

THE  
**WIRE**  
ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

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**Oskar Sala**

Stone-age synthesist

**Le post-rock  
Francais**

Odd Size, Tone Rec,  
Sister Iodine,  
Kasper Toeplitz

**JIM  
O'ROURKE**  
*underground renaissance*

**4 Hero's**  
jukebox

**Butch Morris**  
Orchestrating chaos

**Faust**  
*Return of the  
wreckin' crew*

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## editor's idea

"I tell you what happened yesterday to torture you a bit," writes Bob Van Langendrick, a festival organiser who is e-mailing me from a computer terminal somewhere in the Belgian city of Leuven. As Bob isn't physically standing over me with a loaded cattle prod and a set of arm restraints, I have to say he is teasing as opposed to torturing me. In fact, he is reading himself to tell me about a series of music-based performances that took place the previous night as part of Leuven's (and Bob's) annual Klapstuk Festival. Having already seen the festival programme, and accepting that my Flemish is — how can I put this? — 'imprecise', I was under the impression that Klapstuk was a contemporary dance affair, with any music content taking second billing to the taperscored main events. But Bob's mail contains no references to Paso dables, cakewalks or turkiz trots. Instead, it is an account of a series of duos and trios performed by the members of an ad hoc group specially assembled for the festival and which included Jim O'Rourke. Toshion Kondo, David Shea, Zeena Parkins, DJ Low and Phantom City (Pablo's ex-percussionist Dirk Wachsmel). Bob's breathless descriptions aside (eg "then came the duo of o'Rourke-zeena making noise as hell but with beautiful overtones and always changing harmonies"), low-zeena-shea was next with low and shea making hiphop and janglegrooves and zeena being most terrifying. Finally the whole band together for a 15 minute piece that started very moody and then went to a 'who can play the loudest' great!". I can't vouch for the quality or character of the music made by this tri-continental assemblage. But if you were searching for a group that encapsulated the late 90s meltdown of remodelling, free improvisation, DIY electronics, avant rock and plunderphonics, well, there it is.

I mention all this partly to draw attention to the fact that without Bob's sterling intermediary work, Frank Bauer's photographs of Jim O'Rourke which were snapped at Klapstuk and which now grace the cover and five inside pages of this month's issue, might not exist. But also because Bob's mail is about the closest I've got to actually experiencing any live music events in the flesh for about six months.

That might sound like a strange admission for the

editor of a music magazine, but if truth be told, in this job, going out to see live music, or even committing to 70 minutes of CD time, can sometimes feel like the most arduous of burman's holidays.

I could be mistaken, but two days after receiving Bob's ebullient mail, I thought I detected a similar whiff of ennui during a post-Klapstuk phone conversation with Jim O'Rourke himself, now back in his sweet home Chicago after five days of Leuvening it. Jim seemed pleased enough with the Klapstuk event, and obviously relished the opportunity it gave him to meet and perform with Kondo, but I got the impression that for such a mercurial musician as O'Rourke, the festival was just another entry in the diary that could now be crossed out.

That's one psychic barrier separating the musician from the audience which Jim doesn't address in his interview with Christoph Cox on page 36. Read the wrong way, this interview, and particularly Jim's criticisms and analysis of both his own working methods and those of other musicians he comes into contact with, can appear disingenuous, but only because this is not the kind of thing we expect to hear from musicians, whose public line on their work usually parallels Winston Churchill's advice to politicians "Never apologise, never explain".

No one should doubt Jim O'Rourke's enthusiasm for exploring the wider shores of music, however. One reason for that Chicago-London phone call was so he could tell me that he was going to send me (and about 50 other acquaintances) a tape of an obscure Arthur Brown record which he discovered a few days earlier during a Leuven record buying trip. Compared to London, New York or Tokyo, record shops in Leuven might offer slim pickings for the serious record collector, you might think. But as any serious record collector will tell you, the 'backwaters', those out of the way places, are the best locations to find those off-the-wall records that don't stand a cat in hell's chance of being btmastered 'n' shrinkwrapped by the CD heritage industry.

Jim's description of the record makes it sound like it would have fitted nicely into the Klapstuk event, and I can almost see Bob's post-mortem scrolling down the screen "then came Arthur, most terrifying, all fire and electronics great!" **TONY HERRINGTON**

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# letters

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## Biba's reprieve

If Gordon Taylor from Derby had bothered to think for a moment before attacking Biba Kopf for suggesting that Cleethorpes was "far from the heart of things" for Robert Wyatt (Letters, *The Wire* 164), he might have understood that it is actually true for a musician trying to make a living in the record business. Just as it would be true that a trawler fisherman would be far from the heart of things if he lived in Derby, away from the sea.

When Robert was ready to record, the only suitable local studio was booked for months. You can't ask musicians to drop in for a couple of hours' work if they live over four hours away. You can't promote a record in Cleethorpes — not all journalists are as kind and sympathetic as Biba Kopf; and willing to give up a whole day to travel on our miserable rail system just to do an interview.

Since last November, we have spent weeks and weeks in London, camping out on friends' sofas, just to get Robert's record on the road.

All the years we lived in London, I never noticed any prejudice against people living further north. The support from many Londoners during the miners' strike showed quite the opposite. However, the only reason we sometimes wish we hadn't moved is that we have quite often encountered the kind of knee-jerk prejudice against Londoners that Mr Taylor seems to enjoy demonstrating. It is small-minded, hurtful and depressing. Oddly enough, this prejudice has never come from Grimsby and Cleethorpes folk, it has come from people living there who originate from counties further inland. Perhaps eventually the sea will broaden their minds, too.

**Alfreda Benge** Cleethorpes

## Woman trouble (slight return)

Apologies for returning to haunt these columns. I know apologies are tedious, but I'd like to clear a few misconceptions arising from my original letter (*The Wire* 162) about the lack of women in *The Wire*.

To Vicki Bennett (*The Wire* 163) — I don't think *The Wire* need cover anyone, male or female, whose music is shit. But there are enough women out there who are making brilliant music, and I'd like to know more about them. Also, what are the People Like Us? (*The name under which Vicki releases her latter-day musiquae concrete tape collages*) — Ed

To David Lissina (*The Wire* 164) — I'm not a she, but a he. Your labelling me a "sad feminist" speaks volumes about your avowed open-mindedness. I recognise the old free press refrain (it's such a buzzword on Internet gas-groups). Strangely many of these "anti-censorship" crusaders insist on hectoring people with opinions

different to theirs and telling them to shut up. I detest censorship myself, but don't believe that engaging with the politics of a work is censorious. You yourself write about the "context" of the rape recording in the Boyd Rice piece — that's what seemed to be missing in the article. You write that you admire Diamanda Galas, one of the most engaged musicians ever. To talk neutrally about her in sonic terms without addressing the issues she raises would be missing the point, I think.

Fairness rather than political correctness (with its connotations of laddish interest in goody-goody causes) was uppermost on my mind when I first wrote. Exclusion, even unintentional, amounts to discrimination. I was also puzzling over why so many New Music events have such a nerdy boys' club feel about them and I connected that to what I saw in print about such music.

Tony Herrington assures readers that it's condescending that the current issue (Editor's Ideal, *The Wire* 164)

features more women. I can live with more such happy coincidences.

**Dinyar Godrej** Rotterdam

## Desert brainstorm

I reserve my copies of *The Wire* in batches. Because I cannot rely on the postal service here, I collect my subscriptions periodically, from my father's house, where I am in the UK. I only mention this as some of my comments refer to issues as far back as last November.

At the outset, I have to say that I have very little time for much of the music covered these days, the shift in emphasis which seems to have occurred since I first bought the magazine (not back in the old, jazz-dominated days, but in 1993, I think, with articles on The Cocteau Twins and Anso Part). It is not one which I find very desirable.

Having said that, it is the only magazine that covers much of the music I like and is also written intelligently and with an open mind (there are exceptions to this, see below). My tastes are catholic and some interests are possibly too "overground" for *The Wire* to cover, like Van Morrison or James, while others are very obscure: Paul Giger (Swiss violinist) or Emma Chissan (Marseilles folk artist). One thing I must mention is the fact that much of the music now covered appeals largely on a cerebral and/or visceral level (drum 'n' bass and Dark Ambient).

To my mind, Ben Watson is one of the worst culprits here. An inexplicable devotion to so-called "materialist aesthetics" (dialectic may be an interesting tool for artists, but surely Marxism as belief system has been dead in the water for some time) seems to be the main consideration in how he views a certain artist, while anything in any way connected with the spiritual is sneered at. The ECM label (source of many of my

favourite records) always seems to get a panning, especially Jan Garbarek, who distils more emotion in one track (any track?) than, in my opinion, the likes of Frank Zappa or Iggy Pop do in their entire oeuvre. So, I prefer Ekko-Sven Taur (how about an interview?) to Svarupusher, but of course there is room for both and I feel genuinely enlightened by reading about the likes of Roy Montgomery and Chris Watson. The latter name reminds me of another point I'd like to make, browsing the visionary Touch Records' Website I came across a comment made concerning Rob Young. Apparently he was approached about running a feature on Icelandic composer Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson and said he had never heard of him. I found this both surprising and disappointing. Hopefully he has since heard the soundtrack of the Icelandic film *Children Of Nature*, and will rectify the situation.

**Nell Horner** Bohran

## Terminal terminology

I read *The Wire* regularly and I find it very well done. Plenty of interesting articles, interviews, record reviews and photos — good work. But I'd like to ask two questions. What is the exact meaning of this math-rack phrase? Where did it come from? And who coined this damned post-rock term, and where and when?

**Jedrek** France

*Post-rock was coined by Simon Reynolds writing about the likes of Man, Seefeel, Daxx Infirma, etc. in The Wire 123 (May 1994). As for math-rack, listen to Trans Am, Salaryman, Sinit, etc. and all will be revealed — Ed*

## Corrections

Issue 164 In both the Pauline Oliveros feature and Soundcheck, the distributor for the OnTracks box set should have been listed as 3MVPinnacle. In the Mats Gustafsson article, the label contact for the Gushwatts album should have been listed as Bead, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex CH2 0DG. Label Lone stars Dot now have a new address: Gibraltargatan 2, S-411 32 Gothenburg, Sweden, e-mail [dot@lone.se](mailto:dot@lone.se). Because Biba Kopf had succumbed to The Ugly Spirit, the William S Burroughs article contained a number of erroneous references. The Klaus Maack Film Decoder was inspired by Burroughs's writings, it was not directly about him, although it did feature a cameo appearance. It was set and mostly filmed in Hamburg, not Berlin, apart from the not sequences. And the Berlin not quote came from Jack Sergeant's book *Naked Lens* (Creation Press). The Burroughs "To be an outlaw" quote comes from his dreambook *My Education* (Picador). Apologies for the non-attributions. □



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# global ear

## Beijing

Wang Yong waits around Beijing's Keep In Touch Cite like the model proprietor he is, getting drinks from the bar, ordering food for friends. Western-style bars are no longer anything new in the Chinese capital, but this one, tucked away in an alley near a major commercial center in North East Beijing, has become one of the city's best music venues since it opened a year ago. Big names from the Chinese rock scene, like Tang Dynasty and Cobra, have played here, picking the place to capacity. It doesn't hurt that Wang himself is part of China's small pantheon of rock gods, but his route to the top has been far more circuitous, and continues, to keep him simultaneously at the heart and on the outside of China's tight circle of rock musicians.

The difference is Wang's instrument of choice. He plays the gu zheng, or Chinese zither, not exactly a piece of equipment you can easily hook up to an amplifier. It is a traditional instrument, played solo or with a Chinese orchestra, one with a history dating back to Confucius (551-479 BC).

Wang is one of a growing number of musicians who have focused on the musical traditions of China's 56 ethnic minorities. The players, who may or may not be minorities themselves, bring to light the music of Tibetans, Uighurs (a Turkic group prevalent in North West China), Mongols and other groups that inhabit China's border regions.

Wang's 1996 album *Samsara*, a Sanskrit word for the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, is an eclectic mix of funk, rock, Chinese opera, Heavy Metal, and Buddhism-inspired tracks that utilize gu zheng, chanting and bells. "It's like an album for ten years," Wang says of the work. The record sold out its original pressing, but Wang has since parted with his Taiwan record company. He loves the gu zheng, he says, but also seems resigned to the fact that for the near future, his livelihood will come out of a beer tap, not the metal strings of his instrument.

In China, minority music is one of only a few musical forms actively promoted by the government. Many current rock and popular musicians, like Wang, got their start performing it. To the Chinese government, it helps propagate the idea of ethnic unity within China. Although a beneficiary of this system, Wang disagrees with it. "They want to preserve ethnic music, not develop it. They don't understand it's music," he says.

Perhaps the most visible of China's ethnic musicians is Dadawa, better known in China as Zhu Zhenqin, her real name. "Discovered" by Warner Brothers in 1993, the company has capitalized on Dadawa's unique falsetto voice and her affinity for Tibetan culture and music, especially at a time when the likes of The Beastie Boys

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month. . .

have helped introduce an entire generation of US record buyers to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan struggle for independence.

It wasn't until Dadawa's debut Warner's album *Sister Drum* sold 200,000 copies worldwide that the music industry sat up and took notice. She has followed this unexpected success with a new album, *Voices From The Sky*, a single, "Ballad Of Utsa", whose accompanying video has received prime-time play on MTV, as well as recording a track with Irish traditional group The Chieftains for an album to be released next year, and contributing to the soundtrack of director Wayne Wang's *The Chinese Box*.

However, Dadawa's music has been criticized for commercially exploiting the current popularity of Tibetan culture. For some, her Han Chinese ancestry makes her guilty by association. But she denies co-opting the music of Shangri-La. "It's not Tibetan music," she says. "You can't say that Spielberg makes Jewish movies just because he made *Schindler's List*." Dadawa states that her music is merely inspired by the land and people of Tibet, and that it doesn't pretend to be Tibetan music.

Although Dadawa's passion for Tibet is clear, it is hard to separate the musician from the packaging that surrounds her. While *Sister Drum* forced the listener to focus on the music and not the artist to find the Tibetan links, *Voices From The Sky* is far more obvious. The CD's cover features Dadawa in the foreground, with a dimly lit image of Lhasa's Potala Palace as a backdrop. In the "Ballad Of Utsa" video she appears draped in saffron robes, the traditional color of Buddhist monks' raiment. Even the name *Dadawa* comes in part from the Tibetan word "dewa", which means "moonlight" (the other part comes from "dada").

Dadawa isn't the only Han Chinese accused of riding the minority bandwagon to fame and fortune. While she has drawn more publicity, Zheng Jun has made more money and sold more records. His latest album, *The Third Eye*, went gold after five months, a rare feat for a Chinese musician.

Zheng came to prominence with his first album, *Naked*, which featured the track "Return To Utsa." Zheng is Han and was raised in North-central China, so he isn't speaking from experience in the song. However, it incorporated Tibetan vocalists and traditional instruments, giving it a distinct sound that set Zheng apart from other Chinese rock musicians. "I didn't hear rock music until I was over 20," says Zheng, who is now 28. "So ethnic music is very important to me. Its influence is enormous." Zheng refined the rock sound of his first album when he signed with PolyGram in 1995. "There Is An End To Everything", the opening track on *The Third Eye*, brings together vocalists from the Dai, Tibetan and Mongolian nationalities, and blends them seamlessly with Zheng's own reedy voice.

Somewhat lost in the shadow of Zheng and Dadawa are minority musicians seeking to express their own version of their musical traditions. Tengger, an ethnic Mongolian from China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, is one of the country's best folk singers. He is known almost as much for his appearance in the semi-autobiographical film *A Mongolian Tale* as he is for his music. His first album, *Going Beyond*, makes him almost a Mongolian dead singer for Bob Dylan, with his towering vocals and guitar riffs. Unfortunately, Tengger is also confined to the Mandarin tongue, not his native Mongolian. The ethnic and traditional elements he employs lack distinction, probably because more popular Chinese musicians have already made use of Xiangxi drums and Mongolian harps with greater success.

China's music market may be expanding to include minority elements, but when it comes to the success of ethnic musicians, it's still majority rules.

STEVEN SCHWANKERT

Dadawa



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## When **Faust** say they'll bring the house down, they mean it. Tour manager Ed Baxter reports on the pitfalls of babysitting Germany's premier anarcho-hippies in Edinburgh

I have just sat down for my only meal of the day, little realising that I am the condemned man. Had I known, I would perhaps not have had lasagne and baked apple. At the other tables in this makeshift refectory in Edinburgh's Jaffa Cake club sit assorted hippies, record company executives, bouncers and the beautiful people. The opening line from Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* comes to mind: "I find myself in excellent company."

I'm in Edinburgh to help out some of the hippies, the ones who are here to perform as part of the three-week long Flux Festival of New Music, an Edinburgh fringe event. This means 20 hours waiting in a black-painted room while Zappi Dermaier and Jochen Kriemer set up the combination of rock group and scrap metal

exhibition that is Faust's current incarnation. I introduce them to the ever-beaming David Sefton, the hyperactive co-organiser of Flux, whose mobile phone is never silent. Jochen plays keyboards and smiles a lot. Zappi plays drums and lights fires. As the day goes on, the surly sound engineer warms to the group. I go buy them a bottle of whiskey. Everyone seems pleased to be here. Why is it that I've a knot in my stomach? I bite into another piece of apple.

Jochen walks in, turns to me and smiles. "Can you come upstairs and see what you think? We want to set off a kind of, a kind of firework really."

"A firework? What, an indoor sort of thing?"  
"A Catherine wheel. I suppose you'd call it — it shoots up flames into the air."  
"It sounds a little dangerous. Do you mean a flare?"

"It's magnesium. He's done it many times before," says Jochen referring to Zappi. Faust's on-board one-man disaster zone. "We thought we ought to see if it hits the ceiling or not."

"Oh, fuck. They've just had the club redecorated. I know it's only black paint but I don't think the owner'd be too pleased if you set the place on fire."

"No, no, it's all going to be fine, we just want to set off our little bomb."

"A bomb? Oh for Chrissakes, don't do this to me. What is it with you people? OK, I suppose it's pointless me saying, 'You can't set off a bomb.'"

"Well, yes. I mean Zappi will do it whether we tell him or no, so maybe you should just come and see."

Upstairs. The stage is littered with the contents of a junkyard. Lars, Faust's pyromaniac roadie, is holding a timing device. He presses a button and two enormous flames shoot a steady torrent of pink-tinted magnesium flame towards the ceiling. It looks to me like the polystyrene is melting, but it could be that I'm imagining it. The room fills with thick pink smoke. I visualise the hall packed with people, the panic as they rush for the exits, and recall being knocked down last time Faust played with fire.

"This is what always fucking well gets me about you lot — why do you have to fill the place with smoke? It's just a pain in the arse. I've only got the one set of clothes."

"You see, it's all under control," insists Jochen. The flame continues to burn wildly

"Please don't do this. Think of my ulcer. Look, don't you think that the music will be strong enough without having to set off these fireworks? How many are there?" I groan. "I guess it'd be OK as long as you do it at the end of the gig, right?"

"Oh, four, five."

"Wouldn't one be enough? What if someone gets killed? This is only a fucking rock concert."

"Well, we won't point them at the audience."

"Oh, great. OK, do what you like, I wash my hands of it." I then cite the first rule of performance: "Just don't tell anyone."

Later — show time. The room is full, hot and thick with cigarette smoke. More or less immediately, Zappi lights a flare which has the bouncers covering against the walls. The owner of the club, Big Rab, has somehow got trapped in the area between the stage and the safety barrier, perhaps assuming it's safe. Suddenly, five piles of some noxious-looking powder which I hadn't noticed before are detonated by Lars, and Big Rab disappears behind a wall of fire about six feet tall, which rises up between group and audience. I look around, can't decide whether to dial 999, dive out the dressing room window, or take photographs of the victims as they are crushed underfoot, burned to a crisp, or suffocate in the fumes. Nobody moves — most of the audience can't see how big the flames are and those at the front are pinned against the barrier. Maybe they are too stoned to be worried. Worse still, they probably think it's a carefully controlled stunt — like that woman who was kidnapped. "I kept expecting Jeremy Beadle to appear at any minute." Years of watching TV have addled their brains and they're unable to spot reality when they see it. The ceiling will go up any minute, I can nearly smell the singed eyebrows and see tomorrow's headlines. Perhaps I can blame Sefton, whose charmed remains will be found alongside those of Big Rab. By the time I've reached the extinguisher, the flames have abruptly died down and the concert continues as if nothing has happened. Everyone has a great time. Everyone except me. I am. I was going to say paid to worry, but I remember that I am not being paid. This is all for the hell of it. My holiday.

"You worry too much," Jochen tells me later. He hands me a whiskey and we toast another close call. I have just got to get a proper job.

Next morning they're leaving. Habit means they're worried that the hotel bill hasn't been fully met. I walk up to Jochen, who's about to get in the van, and tell him earnestly that he has to go back to the hotel, something's up, the group had better stay put. A shadow crosses his face, for the first time he looks doubtful, even alarmed.

"They say you can't leave, one of you broke the soap in your room. You'd better have a good explanation, I can tell you."

It doesn't pay anything, but for the second or two it takes him to figure this out I have my minutely brief but exquisite moment of revenge. □



# bites

## J Saul Kane

Martial artist

J Saul Kane has just seen Hong Kong director John Woo's latest Hollywood movie *Face/Off* and is quietly enthusiastic about Woo's translation of his stylish Chinese syntax of murder and mayhem into Americana. "A Hong Kong film has about 100 ideas in it," says Kane, a long-time enthusiast of Hong Kong cinema. "In an average American film you would be lucky to find five. This one just kept on going from idea to idea. When you thought it just had to be over, something else would happen."

That description might equally apply to Kane's own work. He already runs at least two rackets, each with its own alias, and is just about to expand his patch even further. In 1989, his love of HK movies carried over into the kung fu sampling, instrumental HipHop of the first self-titled *Depth Charge* single, while in recent years, his other known quantity, *Octagon Man*, has alternated vintage analogia and brutalist beat science. Recently he added a new alias to the list, Alexander's Dark Band, the music of which he describes as, "Very slow, very simple beats with some nasty noises on top. It's like the HipHop version of *Octagon Man*." And now

## Nils Petter Molvær

Brass and breakbeats

Nils Petter Molvær is in a good mood. His first solo album *Khmer* is just out on ECM, and it's something of a historic occasion, since this is the first album on the venerable German label to be accompanied by — gasp! — a vinyl 12" of remixes. On the afternoon I speak to him, the trumpeter has just returned from a short tour with his new group. "When we were playing up north, one guy who really enjoyed it said it was like we took the Miles tradition into the 90s." Of course, by "up north" Molvær isn't referring to a club in Leeds — he's talking about somewhere near the Arctic circle.

Molvær is one of Norway's best musicians, an awesomely gifted player who seems to shine in any situation, with a trumpet tone that can be urgent, languorous or sensual, but rarely brassy. *Khmer* combines this intimate sound with a very late 90s hybrid of noise and grooves. Oslo is a good base for his assault on the wider world of creative music, Molvær suggests. "Even little Norway, which is on the tip of the world, is a very multicultural place, especially the place I live. You hear a lot of music and meet a lot of people from different cultures, and all these kinds of things filter through you."

Molvær sees himself as a consolidator rather than

he's about to launch the evil, hallucinatory disco of Tet

Given the dark and violent predilections of his various projects, it's a surprise to discover that Kane is a softly spoken, abstergent character, who tends to avoid the visceral atmosphere of London clubland. On the day I meet him, a Friday, he is planning a night in, watching an obscure 70s blaxploitation film on cable TV.

Kane became hooked on kung fu films at the age of 11. It wasn't the high body counts so much as the choreography and elaborate symbolism that floored him. "Anyone can hit a guy," he explains. "In a kung fu film it's about making it look like you're sweating a fly, doing things with style, even if they're horrible."

Drawing on his passion for kung fu, the first Depth Charge single defined his remarkable style of wedding lazy lo-fi HipHop beats to the punches and licks of a chop-socky-y soundtrack. "The whole of that track was done in one day. I just went into the studio with a cassette with some samples on it," he recalls.

The single predates the kung fu imagery of the phenomenally successful Wu Tang Clan. But Kane's not sure about their success. "I think they're really good, I think RZA is genius," he says. "I suppose somebody had the same idea and just did it in a different way. The man difference is they're part of a scene, whereas with me there's no market to sell to, there's just people who like Depth Charge records."

Kane tracks such as "Depth Charge" and "Shaolin Buddha Finger" are now precursors of both TrippHop and its more laddish, bombastic relative Big Beat, but Kane feels little affinity with either scene. "There's a lot of energy but no content. It's like seeing an action film with no story," he says. "I find most of the Big Beat stuff very Radio Two. You hear it on car adverts. It's like Jungle, you get a lot that's like Easy Listening in five years' time people will be laughing at it."

Kane released the first Depth Charge album, *Nine Deadly Venoms*, in 1994. It is still a compelling listen. Samples of badass Italian cowboys, soft porn vampires and the Brazilian football team rub up against a backdrop of sloppy, shuffling beats and deep aquatic bass. The beats of "Bounty Killer II" work in tandem with the chimes of the Lee Van Cleef character's pocket watch in *For A Few Dollars More*, while "Bassard Swordsman" predates Phonte's dazzling "Ni-Ten Ichu Ryu" in realising the percussive qualities of martial arts swordplay technique. "The LP was all about four or five years old when it was released," says Kane. "For your work to be still appealing to people after that length of time says something to me."

Kane, whose love of vintage HipHop led him to release the *Best Classic* compilation earlier this year, featuring rantes such as Fantasy Three's "It's Your Rock", sees a distinct interface between the HipHop,

dub and Electro basis of his music, and the martial arts and Spaghetti Western cinema celebrated by Depth Charge. "It's a black culture thing to be into heroes," he says. "In these films you see people who are impoverished and have nothing, but they still have dignity and class."

While Depth Charge's work has received a certain amount of attention, Kane's other main project, Octagon Man, has been more low key. "I did the first Octagon Man track the day after I did the first Depth Charge track," Kane says. "I really wanted to do Electro tracks. I've just been very sporadic with Octagon Man — it's got a very small following whereas Depth Charge has got more of an audience."

Kane is planning a blitz of releases for the early part of next year. Besides the *Alexander LP*, he has just put out new Depth Charge and Octagon Man singles, and he is preparing to unveil Tet. He previewed the Tet offensive on Depth Charge's recent "Disco Vipers" EP: a Tet remix of the title track converted it into a nightmarish grinding disco groove. He is currently working on an LP of similarly "fucked up disco" for release next year. "There's some great disco music but the scene is horrible," he says. "It's like anything, there are a lot of crap scenes and some good music." **MIKE SHALLCROSS**  
Depth Charge's *Disco Airlines* 12" is released later this month on DC Recordings (through Vato)

an innovator, albeit one based in quite recent traditions — electric Miles Davis, Eno's Ambient excursions, Jon Hassell, as well as the music of his old group Masquero, who recorded a series of albums for ECM in the 1980s that were so indicative of the label's approach to sound and packaging that they veered close to pastiche.

"I don't think anyone can do anything drastically new," says Molvaer. "I just heard a young HipHop band being interviewed on MTV and they said, 'This is totally new, man — there's no bass!' So they think that's new. To come out of the tradition is the way to think about it, though if it sounds new to some people that would be a big compliment."

Though Khmer is his first solo record, he has appeared on eight previous ECM albums, including several tracks on percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky's *Rooting Westward*, where Molvaer's fleet improvisations swirl around Schulkowsky's grooves. Though there are echoes of Don Cherry, Miles Davis, Ralle Mikellberg and Johnny Coles in his sound and phrasing, Molvaer seems to have carved out a playing and writing style of his own.

"I had problems with the sound of the trumpet when I was younger. I really didn't like it very much. It can be a yelling or a squeaking kind of thing. And then I heard some trumpet players like Hessel, for instance, who has created this sound that is like panting, or like a voice or like a flute. When I heard him I was like, 'Oh yeah!' it was like you have this way to attack the problem of the trumpet.

"I actually wanted to do a solo album for a while, but it took a lot of time to find a director," he continues, referring to the genesis of the music on *Khmer*. "I was working with this guy [WVW Holland] who has a studio called LydLab. There was a lot of overdubbing — putting together loops and creating grooves. And then I played on top of it and had some keyboard things that I took away."

Khmer's producer (and ECM boss) Manfred Eicher left Molvaer to record experimentally with his small team, which includes guitarists Einar Aarset and Morten Molvaer. Eicher's job was to turn the project into a complete, coherent album, re-editing, mixing, sequencing and providing "focus" for Molvaer's musical explorations. "Manfred wasn't there all the time — he let me do what I wanted to do and he put together the record."

The 12", which marks both a dumbing down and a pumping up of the album tracks, is not going to do Molvaer's career any harm, though some of the beats pall after a first listen. Best of the remasters are Rockers Hi-Fi, who inject an appositely pitched BOB-style cowbell (cf. Jam & Lewis), an effective groove and an ingenious, almost ECM-like high synth part to Molvaer's most appealing tune, "Song Of Sand." The trumpet blends well with electronic minimalism over the past decade, players as diverse as Ian Carr, Herb Alpert, Markus Stockhausen and Rhys Chatham have all enjoyed blowing over flatter, synthesized backdrops. But Molvaer reverses the process. "You just let them get on with it," he says. "Remasters are sort of jazz



trusicals of the 90s. They come in and they take something and twist it and do different things with it. The Herb Alpert just cut up the trumpet and slowed it down so it sounded like a mixture between a trombone and a trumpet. They are just dealing with that little thing. They hear the atmosphere in the song but then just do it their way. Masquero used to play 'Round Midnight' — at its most absurd, I don't think Thelonious Monk would have recognised it. We were checking out the possibilities for the composition — that is what remasters do." **JOHN L. WALTERS** Khmer and the *Khmer Remasters* 12" are out now on ECM (through New Note/Parade)



## Hal Willner

### Tributes to tribulation

"This multi-artist tribute thing is out of control," cracks producer Hal Willner across a transatlantic phone line out of New York. "I was going to do an Edith Piaf one until I found someone else had already done it. After that you'd call up certain artists and they would go, 'Well, we're scheduled for the Buddy Greco tribute and we're also down for The Gems tribute.'"

Coming from the man who has just released *Sextember Songs*, his second star-studded celebration of the music of Kurt Weill (the first was the 1985 disc *Lost in the Stars*), Willner's complaint might seem a bit rich. Further, it was his interstellar line-ups of artists drawn from rock, jazz, contemporary classical and the avant garde to fete the music of Theolonious Monk, Nino Rota, Walt Disney, and Weill, of course, that set the tone of tribute albums rolling.

"Well, mine were not the first," corrects Willner. "There were those Woody Guthrie memorial concert records from the 70s and George Wein from the Newport Jazz Festival, did an Ellington thing. But I guess my records took it somewhere else. My Weill and Monk projects definitely influenced that Neil Young tribute record, *The Bridge*, and the Cole Porter one, *Red Hot And Pepper*, but what followed were more influenced by those records than mine."

An undantable view of Hal Willner would cast him as a special opportunist who devised a credible way of repackaging the past to appease an arthouse appetite for nostalgia otherwise ignored by the burgeoning musical heritage industry. But such a criticism doesn't hold up under inspection. Before the idea was named by record company marketing involvement, the multi-artist tribute album was Willner's way of repaying the open-format programming of early FM radio. "On any given day you would go from Dylan to, say, Hendrix and Beethoven, and onto an Orson Welles radio show, or

Zappa doing classical things. And at two in the morning you'd hear Ornette Coleman or John Coltrane. That's where my taste evolved," he recalls. "For a while then it seemed that record making had caught up with literature and film. It was crossade city, records as little movies. But now it's just about a bunch of songs again."

Willner has the taste and depth of knowledge to bring together the likes of Diamanda Galas and Leonard Cohen for his Charles Mingus tribute album *World Nightmore*, yet operating in the heavily demarcated world of musical niche marketing, his very eclecticism arouses suspicion. Especially so on a second Weill set that partially overlaps his first. In its defence, Willner points out he never planned for a sequel. In fact, *Sextember Songs* is a soundtrack album he helped coordinate for a Canadian film inspired by *Lost in the Stars*, which came together so long after the original album, it was necessary to recast it. But it's not as if the world is short of Weill interpretations. Though the notion of murder balladeer Nick Cave locked in mortal combat with the century's most enduring murder ballad "Mack The Knife" has a certain ghoulie appeal, you have to wonder what it adds to the Brecht-Weill canon. But suspicions of the project's arch highness crumble under the impact of Charlie Haden's setting of Weill singing "Speak Low." Brecht himself singing "Mackie Messer," or Betty Carter's "Lonely House." Besides, Brecht's bolshy world view has hardly been rendered obsolete by a world where the "defeat of communism has freed capitalism from all moral constraints."

"Interesting how things have gone backwards towards more conservative ways and attitudes and selfishness," concurs Willner. "New York City has become one big corporation. And because Brecht and Weill were talking about human behaviour, their songs really do hold up."

These past few years Willner has been concentrating on soundscaping spoken word discs so people might want to hear them more than once. "Working with spoken voice you can go for different musical forms and sound effects without such eclecticism sounding too weird, or like you're trying too hard," he explains. Of his two William S. Burroughs collaborations, *Dead City Radio* is a highly evocative soundscape, recreating the writer's century. He has also worked with Allen Ginsberg and is currently completing an Edgar Allan Poe disc, *Closed On Account Of Rises*, featuring Christopher Walken, Iggy Pop, Diamanda Galas and Jeff Buckley. "It's coming out around Christmas time, a nice festive record," says Willner.

In the meantime he still holds down the day job he "lucked into" on American TV's alternative comedy institution *Saturday Night Live*, after his early apprenticeship with jazz producers like Joel Dorn and a period of cabbing to finance his Nino Rota disc, *Amoroso Nino Rota*. Doing the incidental music for *Saturday Night Live* affords him a glimpse of a mainstream that would otherwise pass him by. "They have all the top groups on there," Willner decries. "I don't normally listen to that stuff but, as Allen Ginsberg used to say, you've got to see what the enemy is up to." **BIBA KOPY**  
*Sextember Songs is out now on Sony Classical*

## label lore

No. 013

### Barooni



**Address** PO Box 11453, 1001 GL Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**UK distributor** Vital

**Run by** Roland Spekle

**Roster includes** Thomas Köner, Charlemagne Palestine, Lee Ranaldo, Roland Kayn, Christoph Heemann

**Brief history** Barooni was founded around 1986

as a mail-order company. Our first record, *A Bood To A Small Mouth*, featuring Nurse With Wound, zowie! France, Graeme Revell & Anthony Marrese, and Mother Tongue (Zev, Andrew McKenzie and Doro Franck), was released in 1990 along with Thomas Köner's first CD *Munafat Ganjmur*. We opened a modest shop in Amsterdam, which now has joined the Staalplaat shop. For five years I organised bi-weekly concerts in the Ekko club, Utrecht, where acts like Merzbow, Godflesh, God, Cop Shoot Cop played. Since 1995 Barooni is working together with Staalplaat.

**Statement of intent** Barooni is a very personal quest for uncharted musical territory. Barooni publishes only a small amount of CDs each year, for which the criteria are that they have to be genuinely innovative, a freediscovery, and that it's got to have a unique characteristic. The aim is to introduce innovative music of high quality. I see it as the role of Barooni to support artists and create a challenging environment for them, in which their music can develop. As well as releasing CDs we are involved in organising concerts and making contact with other artists for possible collaborations, such as Thomas Köner with experimental film maker Jürgen Reible.

**Other activities** Besides working for Staalplaat, I also work for the Impact Festival, a festival for audiovisual arts, for which I curate music and installation programmes.

**Future plans** The next Barooni release scheduled is Lee Ranaldo's CD and book *Dirty Windows*. I have been working since 1991 on this project, which will show a little-known side of the Sonic Youth guitarist. Palestine, Köner and Ranaldo will publish new works and can be seen on concert stages around Europe and elsewhere. London, where are you?

**Choice cut** Charlemagne Palestine — *Four Manifestations On Sir Biersmens*

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# drifting towards the heat

French music used to be treated as a bad joke. But nobody's laughing at the new breed of French artists raised on post-punk and Industrial culture, and schooled in the fine art of sampler theft. Rahma Khazam meets the vanguard of le post-rock Français: **Odd Size**, **Sister Iodine**, **Tone Rec**, **Bästard**, **Kasper Toeplitz** and **Port Radium**. Photography: Guy Kokken



Bästard's Eric Alden

As its name implies, Odd Size has always been something of an anomaly in France. A small label and record shop, it is located well off the beaten track in Paris's run-down immigrant neighbourhood of La Goutte d'Or. Its dusty shopfront is concealed by ageing posters, and the robed African women and black youths with pimped hair who populate the surrounding streets rarely give it a second look. Inside, the CDs are carefully arranged in cardboard boxes testily to its owner's unorthodox musical tastes, plaques marked 'Throbbing Gristle', 'Extreme' and 'The Hafler Trio' bedon intently, and the walls and ceiling of the cavern-like interior are plastered with posters of *zouvenance*, *Illusion Of Safety*, *Death In June*.

A few of the CDs bear the Odd Size imprint. The label's roster of productions includes a series of quietly influential recordings such as *Onea Gato*, the first album by Marius Schmickler, aka Pluramon/Wabz Sabu, *Transomulaba* by Poli, a collaboration between Schmickler and C-Schütz, *Kontakta* by Kontakta, an early improvising project by Cologne's A-Musik collective, as well as an album by pioneering proto-Industrial electroacoustic ensemble P16D4. Over in the corner hangs a T-shirt with a Nox logo, a memento of those fair-off days when Odd Size's owner Laurent Pernier was a member of that high-flying Industrial group. Nox's music trod a violent, volatile path between *Enstürzende Neubauten*, *Swans* and *Test Department*.

Yet despite the many reminders of an Industrial past that litter the shop, Odd Size is also one of the few places in France to stock the latest releases from the likes of *Staalplaat*, *These* and *Sub Rosa*, and the label's current output remains as uncompromising as ever: just out is Laurent Pernier's own *Drift Towards The Heat*, recorded under the name *Cape Fear*. The disc combines rock guitars with spoken extracts from films and television interviews, soaking up Techno and HipHop influences along the way, and it is Pernier's first solo venture, following Nox's last, still-born album five years ago. Like many other electronic musicians all across Europe, he has discovered the joys of the sampler, and is reveling in his new-found freedom. "I like the idea of being able to compose music without having to refer to anyone else, and even though I brought in instrumentalists, we don't form a group," he says. "Today

a lot of musicians who used to be in groups prefer to work with a computer and a sampler. They allow you to work at your own speed and avoid the endless discussions that crop up when you've got four people in a studio."

Pernier is currently working on two new albums under the names *Quaxotic* and *Zonked*. The *Quaxotic* album is a melodic TripHoppy project larded with Easy Listening samples, whereas the *Zonked* pieces are based on sounds sent to him by such hardcore digital synthists as Ralf Wehowsky and Thomas Dimuzio. As evidenced by the tracks on *Drift Towards The Heat*, Pernier draws his inspiration from a wide array of non-musical sources. "I have tremendous admiration for groups such as *Laika*, *Mouse On Mars*, *Pluramon* and *Meat Beat Manifesto*, yet I wouldn't say that they've had a direct influence on my music," he says. "I am inspired by things that are happening around me. The sound of a car, for instance, can give me an idea for a rhythm. And I've got into the habit of recording extracts from TV programmes. It's like with a record: you hear something really interesting and you want to sample it."

For Pernier, appropriation, whether of day-to-day sounds or of music, is the base, of presem-day music making. "Copying is a notion that's lost its meaning; these days it's no longer possible to come up with something that has never been done before," he says, adding, in a late echo of *Mamster Morris*'s maxim that we've had 60 years of making records, now we sample them, "It's as if we've spent the past 30 years setting out all the ways of making music, and today we take our pick from among all these possibilities. As far as I'm concerned, the question of copyright is irrelevant: once you've released a record, the music doesn't belong to you any more and anyone is free to use it."

Pernier's music is clearly out on a limb compared to what's happening in the rest of the country. Next to Germany and the UK, France has always lagged behind as far as popular music is concerned, and French rock music in particular has steadfastly eschewed all forms of experimentalism. Today however, the rock tradition is on the wane and a new generation of musicians are crawling out of the woodwork. Common to these newcomers is the fact that they are in close touch with similar developments





Odd Size's Laurent Perrier



occurring elsewhere — unlike Magma, for instance, whose comet blazed brightly over France in the 70s but remained tethered in Christian Vander's own private universe. These new groups are taking their cue from pioneers such as This Heat, Jim O'Rourke or Mouse On Mars and creating music that speaks the same language. But as with Laurent Pernier's music, it's a language that as yet has little meaning in France. Tone Rec, two boys and two girls in their mid-twenties prone to fits of giggles and talking nineteen to the dozen, released their first album, *Thugny-Tugny*, on the Belgian Sub Rosa label this year. Significantly, their attempts to organise a regular club night in their home town of Lille foundered after a year of arduous effort, for lack of local interest. "We would like to collaborate with other musicians and meet like-minded people," they tell me. "But there aren't many people who enjoy this type of music in France. We don't fit into any of the usual categories like rock, drum 'n' bass or Techno."

Instead, they offer digital incantations that stitch together smooth, polished tones and murmurs selected from a rich bank of sounds recorded on CDs of their own making. Their luminous, minimalist tapesinnes are interlaced with distorted drum patterns and extraneous noise sourced from a CD broken into two pieces and stuck together again ("We're lucky enough to have a CD player that accepts broken CDs," they joke). Another of their specialties is the prepared guitar: small battery-powered propellers cause the strings to vibrate, producing complex, layered drones. Other sounds include drum and keyboard sounds, as well as a prepared bass guitar, but the subtle beauty of their compositions owes more to their collaborative way of working than to the nuances of individual sounds. "Our music isn't about instrumental virtuosity," they explain. "We aren't a group in the traditional sense of the word. We get together to think about the sounds we want to create and we also swap our instruments around. Electronic equipment doesn't require a lot of practice, and musicians like us are becoming multi-instrumentalists."

"It's difficult to put a label on our music but that's the case of a lot of groups nowadays and it's due to the new recording techniques," they continue. "Rock groups used to have to go to specialised recording studios and they had to have a particular sound, but the groups of today work in home studios and can do what they like, and this has led to the emergence of a lot of undecidable music. And the phenomenon of the remix is also contributing to breaking down this notion of group identity. By remaking someone else's work you're cutting across the barriers between musical genres. Today you can remix a piece ad infinitum, and each of these versions will be even harder to classify than the preceding one — and perhaps that's the aspect that all these electronic groups have in common."

For Tone Rec, the way forward lies in the increasing hybridisation of music. "When Squarespinner mixes Jungle with jazz rock, he creates something new, even though the individual sounds he uses aren't new. This type of cross-genre experimentation opens up vast new possibilities."

Sister lodine are another French group that is subverting traditional rock instrumentation and methodology. Their post-industrial soundscapes are made up of heavily treated guitar and drum sounds, and they also incorporate other sources. "We're interested in sounds of all kinds, and even though we use guitars and drums, we find concrete and electronic sounds equally fascinating," explains Lionel Fernandez, one of the group's two full-time members, along with Erik Minkinen.

In March I caught one of their rare concerts, surrounded by a small, rapt audience, they were creating wonderfully dark and other-worldly ambiances with the help of guitars, drums, analogue synthesizers, tapes and electronics. One of the highlights was

Minkinen's strange, ritualistic performance on the guitar that was positioned in front of him: he extracted sharp, grating sounds from the instrument, scraping away at it with a violin bow for all he was worth. Several months later, on a hot Sunday afternoon at the end of August, I am keen to extract from their soon-to-be-released third album in the cramped work space they share with five other groups deep in the bowels of a Parisian multi-storey underground car park. The whirr of an air-conditioning fan blends in nicely with the music: it's sombre, introspective stuff that pits half-formed, indistinct bumps and taps against far-off children's voices or the drones of prepared guitars.



"We're trying to create emotions through the absence of emotion," explains Fernandez. "There are a lot of this and extraneous elements in music that are there to provoke emotions of one sort or another, and when you eliminate them you're left with the essentials. However tiny or insignificant these basic elements may appear, they can give rise to a wealth of feelings and emotions." Erik Minkinen is the dreamy half of the group. "I prefer listening to the silence around me rather than to music. I can listen to a sound for hours on end thinking about how it can evolve," he replies when I enquire about his musical tastes.

Sister lodine's preferred medium is magnetic tape, and their last album, *Pause*, which was inspired by the cold, barren spaces of the huge disused factory in which it was conceived, took four months to complete. Their methodology is intricate and meticulous. "The process by which one decides to discard certain sounds and keep others has always fascinated me," Minkinen comments. "We're constantly creating new sounds but they aren't always included in the final mix. Sometimes we decide to keep just one element of a long passage and it can take us up to three weeks to produce five minutes of music."


That music cuts across many genres and influences, incorporating rock instruments, electronics and Ambient elements and making extensive use of distortion and effects, but Fernandez is keenest to stress their links with Oval, Mouse On Mars or Microstona. These German musicians enjoy near cult status among the new French groups, and when Mouse On Mars performed in Paris for the first time in October, they shared the bill with both Sister lodine and Tone Rec.

But good music is also being made down south. France's second biggest city, Lyons, is home to the oddly named Bastard (the name cost the group a recording contract with the UK Big Cat label). Two of Bastard's members used to be part of Dirty

Guns, a French group whose Sonic Youth style rock garnered much praise both at home and abroad, and whose last album was produced by Lee Ranaldo in New York. In comparison, Bastard's sound is a potent, atmospheric mix. Built from guitars, bass, drums and the occasional use of cello or violin, it is augmented by CDs, cassettes and a sampler manipulated by Jean-Michel Bernier, who passes in samples ranging from found sounds to Ligeti. "Guitars and drums are starting to be out of date: they have been looked at from every possible angle over the past 40 years. We combine instruments with digital equipment, and this mix is central to our music today," explains Eric Aïda, the group's singer, who alternates on guitar, bass and percussion. It comes as no surprise to learn that Bastard's members have put in time listening to Industrial music. "Groups such as The Hellfire Trio, 23 Skidoo and Nurse With Wound used to be a big influence on us, and Dirty Guns was an encounter between industrial music and the guitar group," explains Aïda.

In the meantime, Bastard have absorbed and transcended these influences, as their recordings testify. "Erase Yer Head No 3", for instance, was a split single issued by a tiny French label that featured Bastard's "Pinball Tenacity" backed with "Luv Me 99".

**"Copying is a notion that's lost its meaning. It's no longer possible to come up with something that has never been done before"**



by Otomo Yoshhide's *Ground Zero*. In fact, "Pebal" Tenacity" was conceived as a homage to the Tokyo group. Bistard's usual line-up was augmented for the occasion by a turntable on which they played extracts from The Supremes and Ray Charles. Last year's *Roadburn*, *Discharged*, *Crossed-off* sealed another crucial connection, being recorded at the Chicago studio frequented by Tortoise and Gaur Del Sol. Their latest album is a more experimental compilation of written and improvised material aptly entitled *Solo Stuff*. Compiled by the group itself, it was issued on their own label, Daddy's Lipsack, and included collaborations with Sister Iodine, guitarist Denis Colin and Tone Rec's Gáetan Collet. An album of remixes entitled *Illinois Hi-zones Rejected* is about to be released, with contributions from Chicago residents such as Tortoise's Bundy K. Brown and Andy Bryant, the sound engineer who worked on *Roadburn*. *Discharged*, *Crossed-off*: "They were very keen on the project. They appreciate our European sensibility and our approach to melody and lyric writing," comments Eric Aklon. Bistard's connections with Chicago are indicative of the new French groups' international orientation: "We have affinities with the Chicago scene and our music isn't a typically French thing," says Aklon.

This attitude is echoed by Richard Franoux of Semantic, a distributor based in Nancy, who set up his Zeigzeit imprint specifically to promote innovative French groups. "Our aim is to put out records that will appeal to international audiences. Paris has a reputation for World Music, but apart from that, French groups have always had a hard time exporting their music. We want to show that interesting things are happening here as well," says Franoux. Zeigzeit's roster currently comprises Sister Iodine and Bistard, but despite the number of cassettes Franoux receives, he hasn't yet felt inclined to sign any new groups. "We don't just want to put out a new record every two months," he says. "We're rather looking for groups that have a strong musical identity and something to say."

Franoux's attitude is equally apparent in the labels which Semantic distributes. He began his distribution activities in 1992, following a spell heading his own label, Permis de Construire. This tiny operation was responsible for putting out one of Musimgauze's first records in 1985, as well as releases by French industrial groups, including Laurent Pernier's *Nox*. "It was the heyday of French alternative rock, of groups such as Mano Negra and Bénurier Nor, and no French distributor was the slightest bit interested in my productions," he recalls. "So I set up my own distribution system, and I also took on a lot of foreign labels and artists that just weren't being distributed in France: The Residents, FM Einheit, Caspar Brötzmann, Einsaüzende Neubauten, Fred Frith." Semantic has been expanding ever since, and today it handles the French distribution for labels such as Sub Rosa, Nova Zembla, Odd Site, Touch and Hypnotic.

Semantic/Zeligzeit isn't the only intriguing musical venture to come out of Nancy. This city in North East France, which is best known for its yearly Improv festival, *Musique Action*, is also home to Les Diques du Soleil et de l'Acier, an independent label founded in 1984 by Gérard Nguyen. Nguyen also runs Wave, which is one of the best-stocked record shops in the whole of France as far as experimental music is concerned, but his label's catalogue is dominated by Japanese musicians,

including releases by Keiji Haino, *Ground Zero* and Opica/B. Among the few French musicians to feature on his books is the avant-rock trio Ulan Bator, who toured France with Faust last June, jamming with the German group in a series of two-hour concerts. UB's Amaury Cambuzat recently played a solo set using prepared guitars and effects at the opening concert of Pop In, a new and much needed performance venue that opened in Paris in October.

The night also featured Fabrice Gero of Pilegrim, a group from Dijon whose line-up currently includes Eric Aklon of Bistard.

Exciting though these initiatives may be, they are isolated occurrences. In a country that is still sorely lacking in labels, distributors and venues, the few groups who are managing to survive display little musical cohesion. As Erik Minkinen puts it: "In France, collaborations between musicians come about as a result of personal affinities rather than musical ones, because

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there are so few groups to play with here." Accordingly, Minkinen has performed with Noel Akchote, a leading member of France's jazz/rock scene, improvising on the prepared guitar, and he recently took part in an evening of solo performances at the Paris Improv venue Instant Chavies, along with saxophonist Michel Doneda. Likewise, Olivier Manchon of Ulan Bator will be playing bass on a new album by cult 70s Rock In Opposition group Heldon.

These 'enforced' associations between normally remote musical initiatives can yield surprising results. Kasper Toeplitz, for instance, is an emerging composer at the fringes of Europe's classical music world, and one of his projects, Slease Art, is an orchestra consisting of seven electric guitar and bass players which harnesses the power and energy of rock. "What I like about rock music is its sheer energy, and these musicians may not know their fingering or read music, but they play the guitar very well," says Toeplitz. "When I first started Slease Art, I had trouble finding musicians who could really play. Many guitarists at the time were under the influence of Magna and jazz rock, it was as if they had never heard of punk."

A recent Slease Art show at the prestigious Fondation Carlier in Paris was a fascinating if problematic experience. Toeplitz conducted the performance, while the seven guitarists and bass players played from their scores, producing sustained waves of sound and prolonged rumblings that took many in the art house audience by surprise. "People always make a distinction between serious and popular music, but as far as I'm concerned Swans and U2 are expressing the very same concerns," says Toeplitz. "Of course, contemporary music is written down, whereas rock stems from the oral tradition. It's a matter of one's musical background: it takes me less time to write on paper than to make a demo."

For one performance of Toeplitz's *Zora Muxti* composition, Slease Art's line-up was expanded to include members of Nox, Sister Iodine and Ulan Bator among 27 electric guitar and bass players. This three hour, 37 minute long piece played with notions of space: the musicians were placed in different locations throughout the venue's three floors in such a way that the audience could walk around listening to the individual guitarists, but there was no point from which they could grasp the piece in its entirety.

Inevitably, Slease Art's music has been likened to the massed guitar symphonies of Rhyx Chatham (who is now resident in Paris) and Gianni Branca, but Toeplitz denies the comparison: "My compositions have nothing to do with Minimalism," he says. "And another difference between us is that I don't have a rhythm section with other instruments playing over it. My music forms a whole: it is written like an orchestral composition and the instruments aren't assigned a specific role." Toeplitz suggests that his music has more affinity with the roaring soundwalls of Japanese noise musicians. "Up until recently you had to have a rhythm section in rock music, or you were lost. But the music of Aube, Merzbow or CCCC has eliminated that idea of a rhythmic support and of primary and secondary elements entirely: it consists of superimposed layers that pass in front of or through each other and of different rhythms." Coincidentally, Toeplitz was due to leave for Japan not long after our meeting to play a series of concerts with the likes of Merzbow and Aube.

In Paris at least, local interest in initiatives such as these is growing, and the underground press, particularly the bi-annual *Octopus* magazine, is devoting increasing space to them. Meanwhile, a swarm of record shops has sprung up in the shadow of the giant glass and concrete curves of the Bastille Opera House: one of these, Ausland,

specialises in the new post-rock, Ambient and Electronica. Isabelle Pechaczky, who runs Ausland, used to work at Etablissements Phonographiques de l'Est, a record shop and alternative performance venue that was the hub of a busy experimental scene between 1988 and 1994. Key-Hano, Kontakta, Merzbow, Jm O'Rourke, Metamkine and Sister Iodine were among the many acts that performed there, and the venue also hosted experimental film and video nights, deliberately cutting across artistic genres. "EPE wasn't only about selling records," says Pechaczky. "It was a place where musicians, video artists and film makers could meet and collaborate. There was an interaction between the different activities, and it made for a very stimulating atmosphere." EPE was forced to close down in 1994, but its renegade spirit lives on at Ausland, which focuses exclusively on independent labels. "Here and at Odd Size we're defending a cause, we're fighting to make available new artistic and musical choices," says Pechaczky.

**“There are a lot of frills and extraneous elements in music. We're trying to create emotions through the absence of emotion”**

It may be a hard cause to defend, but that hasn't stopped new names from joining in the fight. The ingredients of Osaka Bondage's music are radio waves and prepared keyboards and guitars, as well as occasional cell passages, courtesy of Kasper Toeplitz. Another name emerging into the half-light is Ludovic Poulet, aka Port Radium, who combines prepared cymbals with samples of concrete sounds. A former guitarist who happens to be an admirer of the philosopher Deleuze, he was inspired to take this new direction by Sister Iodine. He also has a project going with saxophonist Quentin Rollet, who runs the Paris-based jazz/rock/Impro Rectangle label alongside Noel Akchote. Poulet considers that it's still early days yet for post-rock experimentation

in France. "There's still a strong rock tradition here and rock audiences aren't interested in this type of music. Electronic equipment is only now becoming more accepted at concerts," he says. Yet the first tentative steps have been taken, and with new releases due from a number of the more established groups, the ground is becoming increasingly populated. As Kasper Toeplitz remarks: "Up until recently French musicians were trying to emulate musical trends that occurred outside France, but nowadays they're getting their inspiration from themselves and from things that are happening around them. And that's why things are starting to happen here today."



#### some records

- Bastard** — *Radant, Discharged, Crossed-off* (Zeitgeist/Semantic)
- Cape Fear** — *Drift Towards The Heart* (Odd Size)
- Osaka Bondage** — *Volume 1* (B Abbe Messire Jean, 77230 Garmartin, France)
- Sister Iodine** — *Pause* (Zeitgeist/Semantic)
- Slease Art** — *Alumination Rounds* (Vise Schallplatten)
- Tone Rec** — *Thugny-Trugny* (Sub Rosa)
- Ulan Bator** — 2 (DSA)

#### some contacts

- Ausland** — 104 Rue de la Roquette, 75011 Paris  
Tel: 00 33 1 4659 3821, fax: 00 33 1 4659 0067
- Odd Size** — 24 Rue de Lighout, 75018 Paris
- Port Radium** — 38 Rue de la République, 75011 Paris
- Wave** — 38 Rue des Soeurs Macarons, 54000 Nancy
- Zeitgeist/Semantic** Tel: 00 33 3 8337 1073, fax: 00 33 3 8337 1065



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# particle accelerator

His spiralling multimedia projects, percussionist **Ansuman Biswas** looks to harness the acoustic laws governing the universe. **Words:** Rob Young. **Photography:** Amy & Tanveer

**T**he way an unusual career begins, you'd think somebody up there was trying to tell you something. This pair of bongos flew through the window one night when it was in bed, says the 31-year-old multi-instrumentalist. "I didn't know it was mine!" As a Bengal-born British Asian who's been hyperactive in so many disciplines — not all of them musical — for over ten years, Biswas's talents are difficult to sum up in few words. But they come to an impressive body of sonic research that feeds off his deep interest in such things as particle physics, ancient Indian philosophy and meditation. A trained tabla player and percussionist who studied music and composition at the influential Bath Spa College in the South West of England, he's built up a CV that includes membership of Paul Bunwell's Bow Gamelan Ensemble, leftfield dub/Electroclash outfit, Samy's Ensemble, Björk favourites Acacia and IrishWorld Music group Sin É. He has also collaborated with the cream of the UK's improv circuit, notably Philip Jeck's group, Sight, and as a classical tabla and santoor player, he has formed a close relationship with the Academy of Indian Dance and the Royal Ballet in London. A former music student who's even worked as a puppeteer, he's in demand from cheerleaders — such as Lindsey Kemp, Louise Boino and Sujata Banerjee. And of course, he's worked with his younger brother, Sunjay, who's engineered a number of sonic particle-collisions himself as Bedouin About.

Following his percussive near-death experience, Biswas dropped out of university and asked himself with extreme vigour to "learn the table" (the pinnacle of all percussion!), as well as absorbing as much music as he could in order to take up a place at Dartington, where he got to meet many of the musicians he now regularly collaborates with. During the same period he made contact with Paul Bunwell, who invited him to join Bow Gamelan Ensemble. While working on the Ensemble's ambitious site-specific sound sculptures (often involving large buildings, waterways and pyrotechnics), Biswas was impressed with Bunwell's approach to performance. By taking the audience and musicians out of the concert hall and depositing them in unusual spaces with no stage between them, Bunwell broke down the passive notion of spectators simply paying their money to sit back and be "vaguely moved" or "impressed" by instrumental virtuosity.

In his recent music, Ansuman has picked up on Bunwell's investigations of harmonic ratios — the distances between note pitches that represent "universal" cosmic mathematical values. "There are physical laws which determine acoustic relationships," he explains. "There are certain simple ratios in the universe, and everything in it is subject to those mathematical relationships. I'd like to try to open myself to a clear perception of those existing relationships rather than be so egotistical as to say, 'I'm going to make up new structures, new relationships and new forms.' What's already



there is absolutely fascinating."

His studies in Indian music also convinced him that he was on the right track. "As the rishis developed it, the point of music was to analyse the nature of the universe. So instruments like the tambura were developed to produce a sort of overtones. They produce a field of sound which must be examined actively by the researcher: by listening, but also by allowing the channel through the body from the ear to the voice. And so we have the tambura as a sound field, and the voice picking the relationships out of the sound field. It's a scientific method of finding out how certain tones relate to other tones, and what tensions they produce, and at the same time you start to explore that you find it produces an emotional response in you — a sense of anguish or yearning, or contentment in your mind.

"I want to restate that, to refocus our awareness on that approach to music, because it's become so debased over the last two or three thousand years. Someone might be playing a star and be absolutely skilful and wonderful, but if they're playing with a sense of, 'Look how fast I can play,' or 'Look how perfectly I can render this raga', I find that disgusting, or sick. What are you doing? Are you playing music because you're virtuosic, and people are clapping because you're so brilliant, or are you playing in the interests of analysing the world of sound? If you're doing the former, I don't give a toss."



As far back as 1975, popular science books such as Fritof Capra's *The Tao Of Physics* were making connections between Eastern mysticism and 20th century quantum physics. In recent projects, Ansuman has plunged directly to the heart of this unified field. The engagements currently scribbled in his diary embrace the full avant-garde multimedia armoury. *The Observatory*, a South London installation designed to paint the Hubble telescope into the inner self, and a performance piece for 1998 in which he hopes to remain in a box for a week in order to demonstrate the principle of Schrödinger's Cat. On the day of our interview, he is hard at work with his friend, sound sculptor Jony Easterby, fastening weighted lengths of piano wire to the ceiling of North London's Union Chapel for a performance with a seven-strong group that includes computer violinist Kaffe Matthews, Mexican guitar improviser Gustavo Anzaga, and Indian violinist Chandra Shekhar.

Loud blasts on huge curled forms set the contact-mixed wires quivering, and the ensemble, aided by Brendan Clarke's wall-to-wall side projections, transform the Chapel's ambience into a meditation cell, alchemical crucible, sonic research chamber and temple of eternal flame. Animated skeletons and anatomical drawings are projected on the bodies of the musicians (and dancer Charlie Morrissey), while Ansuman careers round the space like a hyperactive ghost in the cosmic machine, knocking out rages on his huge table set, chanting like a muezzin from the top of a balcony, beating looming drones on Malaysian gongs, and turning his drums into a projection screen for the finale. Thrumming quick as hummingbird wings in empty air, they intercept the tiny video projection of a white-clad dancer, whom Ansuman gently guides down to earth. "I love the visceral activity of playing," he says with ill-concealed excitement. "There's nothing like being in that moment, feeling your body moving, feeling the interaction going on, feeling communication between people playing."

Reflecting Ansuman's belief in confronting "impenetrable" sound and experiences head-on, the dynamic range veers from an all-gates-open drone scream-up, to the tiny clicking of a pair of Easterby's swinging stones.

"You pamper yourself with sounds that feel good and convince yourself that music can sound great. And the more you get used to that, the more forgetful you become that in fact a lot of sounds are painful and unpleasant, reminding you of deep complexes of fear and horror. Sometimes you can get very inexplicable, very violent reactions. Do you keep pushing someone into something that's painful for them? In the end, the decision is yours: you have to say, 'This is painful, but I know the reason for going into it, and I have faith that the pain will eventually dissolve, and so I will try and keep moving forward into it.' Eventually you will get to a stage where you become aware of the subtlest vibrations at the particle level — where you can actually perceive matter at its most fine. But it takes a long time to get down to that level."

So far, Ansuman's own music hasn't been heavily documented on record — he hardly has time to record his own work — but single tracks have started cropping up on the recent spate of 'Asian underground' compilations, notably "Swimology" on

Law & Auder's *East-Westernism*, and "Shift" on Sub Rosa's *Rhythmic Intelligence*. These tracks find him working with contemporary sound design, sampling and the versatile manipulation software ProTools. "I'm really interested in looking at technology at its root level," he says. "I think it's dangerous when we feel so comfortable with the tools we have. If you're surrounded by everything you could possibly want, there's no reason to see through it — to see that, actually it's all empty, and that it's all transitory and meaningless. I think that's the danger of tools."

"A powerful instrument like a computer can make you think, 'Wow, I can really control music, I can make this sound happen, and modulate it.' That kind of power can be dangerous because it lures you into a sense of control. But having said that, I think if you can control with a sense of real play, if you have the humility to allow accidents to happen, to allow unexpectedness and chaos, then these tools can be beautiful."

While he's enthusiastic about the growing public face of the 'Asian underground' — "Suddenly it's so hip to be Asian!" he laughs — he echoes Taken Singh's criticisms of

"indiscriminate sampling of ethnic musics." "I made a brilliant track once," he recalls, "which was a muezzin chant over a drum 'n' bass reggae line, which picked out a certain melodic quality in the phrasing of the chant that I hadn't heard before. It was beautiful, and so funky as well. But there was no way I could use it, because it would be so offensive and disrespectful — people would think it was taking the name of Allah in vain."

A recorded discography can act as a trail left through the wilderness markers of a musician's peculiar trajectory, but also the he that can bind him or her to repeating familiar moves.

"Actually that's a very good way of looking at it, leaving breadcrumbs in a forest," he says. "Why are you doing that? Are you doing that for other people? Or are you afraid that you might get lost and you want to find your way back? Or are you doing it because you've made this bread, and you don't want to carry it around with you? Some people do it for that reason, so they just drop it as they go. Personally, I'd rather not have anything with me, just go, and find myself where I am. And I keep coming across different cultures in the forest, meeting and dancing with them for a while, and then I move on somewhere else."

Ansuman has been getting his head around vespessana, an ancient Indian meditation discipline that is feeding into his everyday life and music. "It means special observation, a particular way of observing," he explains. "Or insight. It helps you to be open to the most subtle influence, and the deepest welling-up that happens. There's an Irish story, where a whole list of people are asked, 'What do you think is the most beautiful music?' One person says, 'A stag bellowing at dawn.' Another person says, 'The giggle of a young girl.' Another says, 'The babbling of a brook.' The first was Celtic seer says, 'What happens — that's the greatest music in the universe!' And that's what pure observation lets you do: observe the music of what happens." This month, Ansuman *Bassess* tours with Butch Morris's London *Skycraper* project (see page 32), and appears with Summit at the Electronic Lounge, see *Soundings* for details. His installation with Jony Easterby will be performed in Oxford in December.





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**Nils Petter Mohr / Klover**

Nils Petter Mohr: trumpet, guitar, bass guitar, percussion, samples / Eivind Aarset: guitar, treatments, talk box / Morten Møller: guitar / Roger Ludvigsen: guitar, percussion, dulcimer / Rune Arnesen: drums / Ulf W.B. Holten: samples / Reidar Skår: sound treatment.



ECM 1617 CD 6379485

**Jon Maneri Quartet / In Fall Cry**

Joe Maneri: clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones, piano / Mat Maneri: six-string electric violin / John Lockwood: double-bass / Randy Peterson: drums, percussion.



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ECM 1645/9 CD 6376132

**Michael Mantler / The School Of Understanding**

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ECM

In the latest reel from his **secret history of film music**, Philip Brophy revels in the choreographed cacophony of Warners Brothers cartoons, and the big bangs of Hollywood blockbusters

Experimental music in the first half of this century engineered a metaphysical realm in which all musical possibilities were rendered as pure sonic data; cinema in the second half of the century has commandeered that realm and transformed it into a chaotic free market. In cinema, any sound effect or musical motif is employed as a value, or marker, of controlled meaning within the film narrative. As a free market, the film soundtrack does not care how conservative or radical sound or music is — so long as it does its job. For some, this is a frightening world where art is rendered meaningless (or worse, assigned a commodity value). For others, it is a decentred and destabilised terrain across which the very notion of value is endlessly re-invented, thereby allowing multiple and lateral invention. This second point of view is evidenced by the fact that radical sound experiments often crop up in cliché-ridden Hollywood blockbusters. Rarely is it marked on the soundtrack of respectable European art house movies — most of which employ a fringing of emotive New World music devoid of irony. Yet the abject noise of Luigi Russolo, the aural complexity of Pierre Henry, the electronic overload of Stockhausen, the sonic density of Cage, the overpowering tonality of LaMonte Young, the expansive harmonics of Penderecki — all have found their way into films whose true contribution to the audio-visuality of the cinema has fallen on deaf ears.

Play a Roadrunner and Coyote cartoon from the early 50s and shut your eyes.

# the rapture of ● noise

Flash back to the Atomic Era: the power of neutrons, the wondrous glow of radioactivity, the breaking of the sound barrier, the trotting of freeway across the nation. Listen to the soundtrack: presses, plants and pumps from fantastic factories, valves, pistons, grinders from unimagined motors, gears, exhausts and turbines from eviscerated engines. This is the true sound of the 50s orchestra: a machine of sonic production, unromanticised for its collapse of music yet fetishised for the sheer power and beauty of its metallica. In the Roadrunner cartoons, Carl Stalling's orchestrations — octane-fuelled cocktails of pre- and post-war jazz populism — spill onto the heated asphalt of Tregg Brown's earth-rumbling, speed-addicted sound effects montages. Bizarrely, contemporary Industrial and dark Ambient musics sound cartoony when compared to the genuine embrace of noise which these family-oriented animated shorts extolled more than 40 years ago.

The cartoons produced by Warner Brothers from the mid-40s to the mid-50s — now marketed as trademarked produce to exploit a vague nostalgic yearning for 'wackiness' — exemplify how deeply the mechanical had penetrated the popular consciousness. Here was a mass medium which auditioned both the scarring cacophony of wartime trauma and the heady eroticism of post-war technologies. The cartoons were digested by audiences whose listening had been profoundly altered by bomb detonations, and for whom the metallic ring of chrome appliances was strangely brilliant and the smell of exhaust a futuristic fragrance. While the Futurists were attracted to noise for its destructive potential — its ability to blast the orchestral

academy back into history — 'common' audiences identified with noise in the Warners cartoons as an acceptable and exciting record of their sonic landscape.

Throughout the hysterically utopian 50s, noise — a gigantic sound effects library of destruction, detonation and devastation — perversely reigns on the cinematic soundtrack. And this is despite the pseudo neo-Romantic toning of symphonies, which tried to split sound from music like the space between two single beds in a married couple's bedroom (a quant denial of sexuality at the time). The blockbusters of the 50s went big on the screen, high on moral content, loud in their visuality, and loud in their sound design. *The Greatest Show On Earth* (1952), *The Robe* (1953), *Moby Dick* (1956), *The Bridge On The River Kwai* (1957), *Ben Hur* (1959), *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* (1959), all are notable for their dramatic peaks occurring in sync with explosive cacophonies when nature, machines and the elements collide in gladiatorial spectacle. In a sense, these blockbusters — far from being commercial 'bombs' — were the exhausted expulsions of a dying studio system in Hollywood. The more the authoritative voice of Hollywood weakened, the louder its soundtrack, desperately trying to convince the world that the MGM lion roar was somehow more than a sound effect.

The cacophony of the Roadrunner and Coyote cartoons is reorchestrated in numerous films from America and Europe toward the end of the 60s. To pick one of many machine-cycles running through cinema at the time, car films like Claude Lelouch's *A Man And A Woman* (1966), Jean Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967), Peter Yates's *Bullitt* (1969) and Lee H Katzin's *Le Mans*

(1971) feature passages of unadulterated engine noise intended to be overpowering and debilitating to the senses. Burning rubber, vibrating chassis, steaming carburetors — these moves sonically while the smoke and exhaust that flared the nostrils of JG Ballard. More often resembling documentaries than fictional stories, they foreground the sounds and images of revving machines for sensorial effect, entraining audiences with a celebration of noise that is brutally montaged and mixed.

A celebratory explosiveness of sound inherited from the big screen aesthetic: still characterises blockbuster cinema in the 90s. Yet a regrettably facile dichotomy still holds fast: that loud, noisy movies have nothing to say, and are thus covering up the vacuity, while films of substance have subtle soundtracks that don't need to draw attention to themselves. In reality, supposedly 'individual/personal/expressive' films which shy away from the crassness of the big screen sound-aesthetic resort to the far more repellent and archaic model of harmonious accord and lilting idyllicism which has always imparted humanist cinema with a processed chemical-saccharine taste. Films wishing to avoid noisiness remove the excesses of sound from the mix, but leave in the gross orchestration (full or sparse) against which noise always fought. Listen to *The Bridge On The River Kwai*. The lugubrious score by Malcolm Arnold desperately (and vainly) tries to drown out the dynamite blasts which the audience has been waiting to hear for more than 70 minutes. Noise on the

big movie soundtrack is and always has been its most progressive element. An avoidance of it in the name of sophistication is a decidedly reactionary move.

Even though Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) is overly enraptured by the stylized existentialism typical of Michael Antonioni, the Italian director never produced anything that sounds like Coppola's masterpiece. With unerring precision and awe-inspiring craft, sound designer Walter Murch sculpts a psychological landscape of piercing intensity that demonstrates how complex and effective noise can be in detailing shifting mental states. And I mean noise: interference, distortion, un-fidelity, overload — all the tactile signifiers of the moment when sound becomes its Other, its nightmare, its transfigured monster. Gene Hackman's understated, repressed portrayal of the solitary sound recorder bent on tapping and taping other people's private conversations gives rise to a character whose stability is maintained by treating dialogue purely as legible sonic data. But when he reads meaning into the recorded dialogue, the pure sound then becomes oppressive noise, representing the impenetrability of both the tape he has recorded and the psychological wall he has built around his sense of self. The film contains many stirring moments predicated on the Stockhausen aesthetics of ring modulation, sweep equalisation and inverted compression ratios, but never are they employed as decoration. Walter Murch brings the noise as the drama demands it, figuring the soundtrack as a resolutely tailored text with little concern for gratuitous effects.

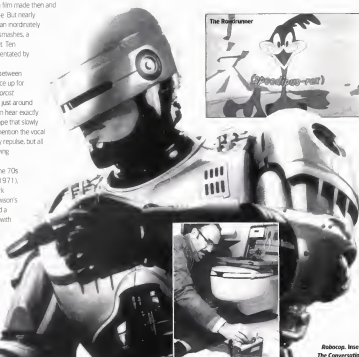
*The Conversation* is unsettling due to the way it sonically pictures the sound of a mind falling apart. William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) — with sound editing by Chris Newman — unsettles by attacking the audience with sound. Poles apart from just about every other demonic possession film made then and since, the film spends its first half by showing little. But nearly every edit is an incisive aural rupture caused by an inordinately loud and disproportionately banal sound: a cup smashes, a phone rings, a car horn beeps, a door slams shut. Ten minutes into the film you are put on edge, disoriented by the viciousness of common sounds while being smothered by a visual domesticity. The tension between sound and image is crucial to setting the audience up for the film's visual, visceral opera. Watching *The Exorcist* knowing that the intrusion of unspeakable evil is just around the corner puts you even more on edge: you can hear exactly how Chris Newman has constructed a soundscape that slowly turns the New England calm inside out, not to mention the vocal chords of young Regan herself. Key images may repulse, but all sound in *The Exorcist* is violent, forceful and vilifying.

Numerous other big noise movies trail into the 70s. William Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971), Richard Rush's *Freebie & the Bean* (1974), Mark Rosson's *Earthquake* (1974), Norman Jewison's *Rollerball* (1975). Cartoons reached a similar peak of sonic saturation with the sound effects in Hanna-Barbura series like *Scooby Doo: Where Are You?* (1970),

*Moby Dick & The Mighty Midget* (1972) and *Speed Buggy* (1973). But as the 70s progress, filmic realism becomes caught between socio-political dogma and escalating stylisation. The power of noise is usurped firstly by postmodern allusions to foregrounding visual artifice, and secondly, the demand for fidelity required by the development of Dolby noise reduction applications. By the mid-80s, a balance is thankfully struck by the superior quality Dolby affords, and the hyper-material aggressiveness with which sound and noise could manipulate an audience.

One of the best and naughtiest examples of this is Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1985, and well worth auditioning on a Dolby Surround Sound laser disc). As cartoony as the Roadrunner shorts, and as hellbent on the cacophony of the machine age but with a non-comical, brooding tone, *Robocop* fetishises noise to extremes. Guns, cars, doors, lifts, monitors, radios, buttons, gears, levers, pistons, drills, cranes, wheels, gates — everything is mechanised in this Detroit of the near future. If it moves, it makes a noise. And because noise is so fetishised in this movie, everything is constantly moving. Major fight sequences — *Robocop* battling it out with ED-209 in the corporate office, the big shootout in the drug factory, the gang playing with their new weaponry downtown — are saturated with a mind-boggling track-lay of hundreds of sound effects and sonic inroads, each perfectly legible in the mix and designed to make you jump in your seat. The fictional Detroit of *Robocop* — like the actual Detroit that inspired the electronic landscapes of original Techno — is a sonic minefield of intense action aimed as much at the nerves and stomach as the eardrums. Once again, no 'grand' cinematic statements carry the effectiveness of *Robocop*. Like the Roadrunner shorts, it is another example of how the radical can co-exist with the popular in the chaotic free market of the film soundtrack.

ALL PHOTOS: BRISTOL



**Robocop, inset:  
*The Conversation***

**Butch Morris's** self-devised 'conductions' create spontaneous cross-cultural dialogues between improvisors. Visiting the UK to rehearse his *London Skyscraper* tour, he reveals the method behind his patent sonic surrealism. Words: Ben Watson. Photography: Kim Tonelli

When Lawrence D 'Butch' Morris returned home to the West Coast after the insanity of the Vietnamese War — a non-medic, he'd spent his time sewing up the wounded, only being exposed to enemy fire when collecting flowers for a colonel's desk — he found saxophonist 'Black' Arthur Blythe and trumpeter Bobby Bradford playing free jazz in his mother's garage. His bass-playing brother Wilber had invited them over, and the music, Butch says, was shattering. Ruthless, melodic, free — it penetrated his soul. "What they were playing was the Black Revolution," he would later tell Greg Tate. It's surely this radicalism, this anti-political intransigence, inherited in part from Los Angeles's small but intense black free music community, that enabled Morris to come up with the notion of conduction, his patent process of realising ensemble music in real-time by directing large groups of musicians, via an elaborate series of visual cues, through organic improvisational soundworlds.

Right from the get-go, jazz, in the audacious shape of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong, questioned the need for the ponderous paperwork that surrounded European music, the banks of violins arrayed like desks in an office, paranoid accountability for even the smallest notes. (Today, of course, Oliver's and Armstrong's revolutionary music is sealed-off in near-impenetrable heritage aspic.) Bringing jazz heresy to the heart of the dragon, Morris's conductions suggest that all the paraphernalia of classical music — from the massive orchestration of the Romantics to the dense serial charts of the Darmstadt group of composers, from graphic scores to John Cage's wifely experiments — is superfluous, the clutter of an antiquated mode of musical production. With conduction, the composer abdicates the 'score' for gestural improvisation. It declares to the classical establishment that the time has come to create symphonies in the naked instant.

Like politicians covering behind their spin doctors and image consultants — or poets who hide behind the printed page — maybe composition is simply the subterfuge of those without the moral and social righteousness to stand up and make statements in real-time, to risk true communication, in the flesh, spontaneously, without props. Morris lifts the magic baton and the music speaks for real? It's an idea.

So how is it done? Morris's conductions tend to be realised via ad-hoc groupings of often diverse musicians. This month, for instance, he will tour his *London Skyscraper* conduction around the UK, cueing a group of around two dozen musicians drawn from free improvisation (Evan Parker, Steve Beresford, AMM's Keith Rowe), the classical fringes (bass clarinetist Roger Heston), as well as rogue elements such as tabla player Ansuman Bhowmik and samplist Kaffe Matthews. A few days' rehearsal prior to the performance facilitates Morris with what the musicians can do. At the same time they learn his vocabulary of gestures — sustain, repeat, drop out, come in, louder, softer, higher, lower. During a performance, everything is funnelled through Morris: he stands on the podium with a baton and moulds the ensemble sound like clay. All must keep their eye on him throughout.

Morris's method does not just dump the hallowed institution of a written score: it offends the egalitarian, collective ethos of free improvisation, too. Derek Bailey once packed up his guitar and left during the first five minutes of a conduction rehearsal. Morris once had what he calls a "mussy." Four musicians walked out because they felt he was being authoritarian. "I must admit that I ask for a lot of discipline," he says. "When you've got only two days rehearsal, all the information comes at you like a ball of fire. If I say I need your attention 100 per cent of the time, I mean 100 per cent of the time. If a musician misses a cue, I'm going to get upset."

Morris's signals allow him to arrange as the music proceeds. Musicians are brought in and out both individually and in groups. Morris doesn't like raggedness. He indicates what musicians are to do, and then brings them in on one downstroke. He can point to a guitarist and a koto player and imitate a rugged cross-cultural dialogue, indicate the string players and suddenly down a caterwauling saxophone in sweetness. The ensemble are told to memorise certain passages by associating what they are doing with a number (indicated with fingers). This allows Morris to plunge the ensemble back into a reprise.

"I know who's bullshitting and they know who's bullshitting," he says. "The conductor is in a great position. I'm looking into the musicians' faces, and the audience is looking into their faces, but the audience can't see me. Know what I mean? Everybody can tell when you're bullshitting, because it shows on your face. It's kind of a crude way to look at it, but it's true." Keyboardist Pat Thomas, a member of the *London Skyscraper* group, says, "The thing is, he's a musician. We're not going to be able to get away with anything. He knows all the tricks."

Butch Morris's first conduction was released in 1986, an album titled *Current Tensions in Rhythm in Modern America (A Work In Progress)*. It was a stunning debut, sounding different from anything happening at the time. Simultaneously nervous and dreamy, its only precedent was the original 1975 Obscure label recording of Gavin Bryars's *Sinking Of The Titanic*: sumptuous sonic surrealism, a confrontational sense of occasion. It used New York downtown heroes such as Frank Lowe, John Zorn, Zeena Parkins and Thurman Barker, but sounded totally different from the kind of protean blow-outs familiar from those musicians' other work. Its cool, agitated drift underlined the mordant wit of the title. By focusing the ensemble on himself, Morris creates what he calls "one organ of total comprehension."

Last year, The New World label released *Testament*, a massive ten CD box set which contained some of Morris's most sensational conductions. The surreal, fantasy-



# lightn

landscape imagery supplied by poet Allan Gaudreau for the *Testament* booklet was strikingly apt. Morris remembers that conduction audiences often feel they've entered a "waking dreamstate."

"I've got tons of letters and notes people hand me after concerts, where people talk about things they saw, visions, where they felt they were in a landscape and up in this area there was this little patch of sky, and right here a brick wall."

However, Morris is wary of entering into any speculation about sound and mental images.

"I don't have a legitimate interest in that. I have a legitimate interest in trying to understand the psychology of the musicians — I learn something new every time. When I get on stage, it's how the musicians respond to my instructions — to sustain, to repeat — that gives me the impetus to move that information around the room, to create something. So I start dealing with the sound and build it. There's this constant discussion — I try things out until I have a really solid idea."





**ing rod**

Morris is wise to concentrate on the situation in hand rather than seeking programmatic effects. Since triggering visual memories relies on already established mental associations, such an agenda invariably reinscribes to musical cliché.

"I'm trying to stress silence, to get musicians to take their time. You can always stop and think. Always. One of my gestures is called 'expand/deconstruct': the tendency for most musicians is to fill every empty space with sound, rather than take more time, and this is what I insist on now. I want everyone to hear what everyone else is doing."

Much of the music on *Testament* is distinctly impressionist. Someone whose brain had been softened by reading Gilles Deleuze would probably find it fashionably borderless and 'rhizomatic'. Certainly, without the brittle logic of either free improvisation or the score, conceptions tend to be sonic immersions rather than white-knuckle rides. Sometimes they are so pretty they suggest ballet music. Would Morris consider a conduction of, say, drummers?

"I'm going to next year," he replies. "I'm open to anything. Conduction works with all instruments — if the instrumentalists can figure out how to apply the gesture to their instruments. The most difficult experiences have been with electronic instrument builders who don't know how to cut off their sound. Or they can't control pitch — the difference between high and low. I'm interested in clean edges, beginning and ending."

As a boy, Butch Morris learned piano, composition, trombone, trumpet, French horn, bass and flute. In Los Angeles in the 60s he played with Charles Moffett — Ornette Coleman's late, great drummer. Indeed, he credits the idea of conduction to Moffett, and cites its deployment by Sun Ra and Frank Zappa. Moving to New York, he became a founder member of David Murray's explosive, seminal Octet. Despite such involvements — and free-improvvised encounters with the likes of Billy Bang, John Zorn and JA Deane — he has always thought of himself as an arranger. An early job had him copying big band charts, and he was intrigued by Gil Evans's subtle adjustments when he'd toured at his orchestra.

"The ensemble has always been more important to me than the soloist. Matter of fact, I never felt that I was a soloist, no matter how many bands I played trumpet or cornet in. I'm not Clifford Brown, I'm not Wynton Marsalis, I'm not any of the people in the trumpet lineage. To be a soloist you need to be a competitor, there's all the verbiage in the soloist's lingo that says, 'I'm gonna kick his ass'. That doesn't interest me. Gil told me once, 'I love the way you come in'. He wasn't talking about the content of my solo, he was talking about how I entered after someone else had played. He knows I'm going to throw a new edge on the music. And that's the way I think: create levels, create depth, create angles."

In his conceptions, Morris gives musicians an open brief with regard to the material they give him to mould — though he does have two pet hates. One is by-



rote 'jazz', when players follow his gestures with "a bunch of saty-fourths" (he parodies a typical bebop horn line). The other is the idea that a repeat requires the unreflected trills of Minimalism.

"Often, especially in the West, when I say 'repeat' and give the downbeat, people's first response is to play something that could be 20th-century Minimalism. They pick two or three notes and go 'beedle-beedle-beedle.' As soon as they set that up and they see it works, every time I say 'repeat' they do it again. And again. And again. Night after night. There are so many other things that can be thought of as a 'repeat.' Beethoven was a great repeater. If I get something too compressed, I have to take it apart immediately. 'Beedle-beedle-beedle' — I'm bored already."

One of the concerns of orchestration, one that comes as a surprise to listeners who only know music through albums and PAs, is controlling the spatial aspect of sound. Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez devised serial procedures to allow 'events' to ripple through the orchestra. Iannis Xenakis used Chaos Theory to calculate effects which sweep the auditorium. Morris controls such events by using the intelligence of his musicians. Instead of merely counting rests and obeying orders, they have to listen and respond creatively.

"In a large ensemble, the tabla player way in the back and the violin player over there, they will not be able to hear each other," Morris says. "But I can hear them very well. So if I want to start an idea and make it move across the room to the tabla player, I have to create a path. I have to find a way of getting that information to him. I tell this person to play what the violinist is playing, then tell another person to play it and so on. Finally, I can tell the tabla player to play it. Then I can take everybody out, and just have these two people playing this idea: the violinist who originated it, and the tabla player's interpretation."

Although he has performed a concert with classical musicians — The Orchestra Toscana — Morris generally uses improvisors. Indeed, he declares that conduction is predicated upon the rise of a global generation trained in jazz and free improvisation. He has performed concerts with David Murray's jazz big band, with the New York avant-garde, with European improvisors, with Turkish and Japanese musicians playing ethnic instruments. He has invented special signals to ask sampler players to 'trap' and 'release' sounds. Ultimately he envisages transcultural encounters between all these forces. "Conduction was conceived," he says, "to help merge the many musicians and musics of the world into one creation, one time."

Conduction represents a coming-of-age for free improvisation, an acknowledgment that orchestral musicians need no longer be dumb terminals for the composer's software; intelligence has migrated down the net, towards the performer.

So who is the 'composer' of this music? Property rights crystallise once fortunes have settled down, one of the hazards (or advantages) of new music methodologies and technologies is that they beg questions about copyright and authorship.

"It's a collective," says Morris. "Under the circumstances you have to register it under one name, [but] I share authorship with everybody. Hopefully by the end of this year royalties for Testament will go out to everyone who's on there. I'm not looking for sole authorship. Everybody gets their share of the royalty, and I can go on about my business and do what I do. That's exactly what stopped me playing cornet. I didn't want what they call an 'onion'."

Does he miss playing trumpet? I mention that Derek Bailey once said he considered Morris a great cornet player in his days of 'ad-hoc' encounters.

"I pick it up almost every day when I'm at home — five minutes, half an hour, sometimes I get caught up in something and it's two hours. Cassandra Wilson called me up and said, 'I know you're not playing, but please play on my record?' She left a little track on her record open for me for six months. She called me and said, 'Butch, come on.' My horn wasn't in New York, it was in Berlin. I called Graham Haynes up, and I said, 'Can I borrow your horn?' I went into the studio, they let me practice for

half an hour. I said, 'Let me hear the track.' I played and she said, 'That's great, get out!' If someone's interested I may do it."

Butch Morris has put himself in a fascinating position. Many free improvisors will deny his hubris, just as many composers will poo-poo the idea that some guy waving a stick around can achieve music as valid as that produced by their dots. Indeed, during a press conference to launch the London Skyscraper tour, he evoked the kind of fierce decisiveness that can make enemies. He'd finish off a controversial topic by asking, "Question?", and responded to a request for enlightenment from clarinetist Alex Ward, another member of the London Skyscraper group, regarding his distinction between 'arbitrariness' and 'the random', by saying "That's for you to find out!"

Pointlessness and scene-collusion have rarely been spurs to musical creativity, however. Those who appreciate the tight discipline that undergirds the supposed 'anarchy' of leaders like Sun Ra and Frank Zappa will appreciate that someone has chosen to — quite literally — 'seize the baton'. Morris's conductions raise social and political issues that are obliterated in the tight, safe world of such self-consciously 'important', 'statement-making' projects as Wynton Marsalis's *Blood On The Fields* or Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Your Rockaby*. What music 'sounds like' is a result of human activity and organisation. If you organise orchestras like an Andrew Lloyd Webber, your music will sound like his. Every combination of music-producers — whether a rock group or symphony orchestra or DJ-plus-sound-system — is a psychodrama, an arena for testing social relations.

"You have to know, psychologically, when to answer someone's question and when not," says Butch Morris.

"You have to make people think about their decisions, even when they're away from the bandstand. If you don't, they'll bring to the bandstand everything that they've relied on for years, and that's not what I want. I want

their historical information, I want their theoretical information, I want their sociological information, but I want them to go beyond. I want them to expand their musical personality all the time."

Sometimes, Morris breaks his own rules, and lets a musician dictate. Take the case of alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe. Although he's made commercial decisions that have dimmed his reputation — showcasing his virtuosity in 'jazz' settings rather than letting his musical fire scorch the path it should — Arthur Blythe is still a monster saxophone player. When he took part in a conduction in 1989 (*Conduction #15*), Morris made it a concerto.

"Well, what do you do with Arthur Blythe?" he says. "You let him go! That's what he's there for. I know Arthur from the 60s, when he was off fire and passion, kid, go for the throat. I knew if I could put him in the same situation I could get the same kind of fire. At the end of the concert he told me, 'Had we gone on a bit longer you would have had it.'"

Watching Ron See and Repräsent strike a drum 'n' bass storm line on TV recently was like listening to a conduction: it packed the same sensation of real-time risk of immediacy and confrontation. There are stacks of 'virtual' music producers in Electronics seeking to achieve the multicultural dialogue Butch Morris is after, however, his commitment to music as ritual and occasion is allowing him to coax forth evocations undreamt of in the land of the soundbyte.

On the English tour, Orphy Robinson — himself part of a *Current Trends* event in 1987, alongside Courtney Pine and Steve Williamson — will be brought under the same roof as free improvisors and hi-tech classical players. The Bo's English jazz 'evolution' ran aground on the treacherous reefs of marketable imagery and the star system maybe Butch Morris's conduction will heal some rifts, open up new ones, tear the roof off the ceiling, and give Robinson's demonic impro-vises some much-needed exposure.

And the best of it is, nothing can be predicted until Morris's baton signals 'play' and the alchemy begins. For details of this month's London Skyscraper tour, see *Soundings*. Testament is still available on New World (through Harmonia Mundi).

**“Everybody can tell when you're bullshitting, because it shows on your face. It's kind of a crude way to look at it, but it's true”**





For Chicago omni-musician **Jim O'Rourke**, every sound brings into question the meaning of life. Yet he is one of the world's most personable and in-demand musical collaborators. Words: Christoph Cox. Photography: Frank Bauer

# studies in frustration



"**T**ruths," Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "are illusions about which we have forgotten that this is what they are, metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power, coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins." According to omni-musician Jim O'Rourke, the same idea can be applied to music: "People are getting to the point where everything is completely empty gesture," he tells me over coffee at his apartment, which occupies one floor of an undistinguished two-storey house in Chicago's Logan Square. "You see it on TV, you see it in film, you see it everywhere. Music is just filled with empty gestures."

As an example, O'Rourke cites film music. "It is sort of common denominator music, heavily lifted from Stravinsky and Shostakovich," he says. "Now they establish certain gestures to mean, you know, there's-a-guy-coming-with-a-knife. That gets soaked into generations of film writers and, at each successive step, they're continuing to saturate these ideas while losing touch with where they're coming from, so that by the time of something like *Nine Inch Nails*, when a guy makes a 'spooky' sound, not only is the public thinking they're hearing something indigenously spooky, but so does [Nine Inch Nails frontman] Trent Reznor. It's a form of dumbing people down."

Jim O'Rourke is a sonic semiotician, a musical materialist, a digital deconstructionist. He describes his work as a series of "research reports" that investigate the socially fixed, yet ultimately arbitrary, nature of musical meaning, interrogating established relationships between sounds and their social value in order to produce new relationships and allow these sounds to be heard again differently. "The whole basis of almost everything I'm interested in," O'Rourke explains, "is to point out things that are taken for granted — aesthetic, conceptual things — don't take things for granted. Look, you're hearing this and you're hearing all of THIS." Heard through the filter that is Jim O'Rourke, THIS carries a whole musical and social context and history.

Jim O'Rourke's discography is already vast and diverse: 120 entries that range from solo guitar improvisations to extended tape compositions, string quartet elaborations to Industrial music, Electronica remixes and idiosyncratic pop arrangements. What unifies this genuinely astonishing body of work is his "investigative spirit," as he terms it.

A stocky 28-year-old with thick black-rimmed glasses, O'Rourke grew up in a working-class family on Chicago's northwest side. In his early teens he discovered Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez through the liner notes of King Crimson and Frank Zappa records borrowed from a local library. By the age of 23 he had been invited to play at Derek Bailey's Company Week. He'd also released volumes of his own material on cassette and CD, and performed with some of Chicago's most challenging experimental rock ensembles — not bad for juvenia.

It was O'Rourke's extraordinary prepared guitar technique that established his international reputation. "I first started doing it in grade school as a way to avoid having to practise the stuff I was given," he remembers, recalling his habit of using bottles and other household items to rub and knock the guitar strings. "My mom would always be asking, 'What's that?' Oh no, that's not what you're supposed to be practising!" A few years later, O'Rourke's encounter with John Cage's prepared piano music enriched these precocious experiments.

But O'Rourke's approach to the guitar was shaped as much by a fascination with strange sounds and novel ways of playing as by his increasing alienation from the instrument and its social significance. The excesses of Progressive rock superstardom and virtuoso guitar heroes made him sharply aware of the quasi-religious separation between performer and audience. "I went through a whole period in high school of being obsessed by people like Stockhausen," he explains. "It wasn't until I grew up, got in the world a bit, and started having to develop aesthetics and morals, as it were, that I started to find these people a bit repulsive. My fascination with them earlier on had to do with that sort of insecurity that these people feed off, the hierarchy they create, with, like, a godhead. As I became increasingly more upset with those ideas, it also tied in with this sort of cult of personality idea about 'the great musician,' the 'virtuoso'."

At the same time, O'Rourke continues, "I became increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of being a 'good guitar player', but still wanted to do stuff with the guitar. So I had to develop some sort of way to let the audience in on the uncomfortableness of it. More and more I started playing the electric guitar where I was hardly touching it. By the end, right before I stopped doing that stuff, I would just stare at the guitar like an audience member. A few times I did a show where I played the guitar from the audience. I had a bunch of devices that would be triggered by speakers and those speakers were connected to different walkie-talkies. I had the remote control in the audience and played the guitar from there. I would do it, hopefully, where people wouldn't see me, which would just defeat the purpose. Once I did that, it was time to stop."

These experiments culminated in O'Rourke's 1993 album *Remove The Need*, a gorgeous set of solo prepared guitar improvisations recorded live in Zurich and Chicago. Employing a host of homemade mechanical devices to generate vibrations, O'Rourke coaxes from the guitar an orchestral mass of resonating tones that sounds, at times, like an underwater canyon, at others, like a symphony of turbines. Yet for him, the record represented an ideological dead end, a solidification of experiment into habit. "Once I became really comfortable with a particular type of preparation or really got into what it was doing, I'd throw it away. And then, once that wasn't enough,

I started playing instruments that I wasn't comfortable with."

O'Rourke constantly returns to the theme: the educative value of disposing yourself in unfamiliar settings, disconcerting scenarios, as well as ongoing self-criticism. It's a lesson he learned from Brecht's theatre and Godard's cinema. "I'm actually more interested in film theory than anything," he says. "That's where I learned everything, from reading film theory. When I got into Godard it taught me to not take these pressures for granted. It was like, you've got to remember, you're just an observer of someone performing. All these things were much more important in helping me figure out about music than music was, which is why I'm always very wary of music. Music's one of those art forms that's completely ignorant of itself. It takes everything for granted. Film theory is critical of the medium itself, music is not critical of itself at all."

Following the release of *Remove The Need*, O'Rourke stopped playing the guitar altogether and turned to his other early love: tape composition and musique concrète. "I had made tape things since I was a kid," he recalls. "When I was in sixth grade I bought this Tascam cassette deck where you can record a channel at a time and then bump it back and forth. I have all these tape collages from when I was in grade school [made] from sound effects records and stuff, just bouncing stuff back and forth."

More than a decade later, O'Rourke remained interested in the myriad possibilities of tape collage and electroacoustic music; but here too, his attitude had become more self-critical, aware of his own investment in the genre, and of its — and his own — historical and social context. "Increasingly, these concrete pieces I started making were about the question of making concrete music," he says, alluding to the meaning of sounds and media and how possible (or impossible) it is to alter this. Referring to his 1993 album *Rules Of Reduction*, he says, "I was interested in what does it mean for me as this American teen, growing up in my room in Chicago listening to Luc Ferrari and getting into this mythology of concrete music and then growing up and realising that it has nothing to do with me, that I has to do with France in 1960, and that I've created this mythology of my own that actually has nothing to do with the music. So I tried to address that by going through all these standard gestures of musique concrète and getting confused by them."

A mini CD released as part of the French Metamusic label's *Cinema For The Ear* series, *Rules Of Reduction* could be subtitled "An American In Paris." Drawn from field recordings made on a trip to France, the piece runs through a host of musique concrète clichés and sounds coded as "French" while trying to subvert these at every turn by interrupting them with a bang, fading them into silence, or allowing them to linger to dying effect.

In line with his efforts to foreground and subvert musical expectation, O'Rourke assembled a group in 1994 and named it after a Luc Ferrari composition, *base-glace*. The quartet's only full-length album, *When In Voritas*, features O'Rourke not as a frontman but as a behind-the-scenes saboteur. Having recorded run-of-the-mill Industrial rock guitar, bass and drum tracks, O'Rourke skewed and spiced the tapes, warping and punctuating them with electronic noise and found sounds. The result is a curious collage of clipped grooves and truncated riffs that are never allowed to pick up steam. "I put together this band to look at what the band dynamic was and to document it in some sort of form," he explains. "The whole record is like: 'heh! Why did you expect that? Why are you continuously expecting [the drum hit] 'bah-da-bah-da-bah' to end in 'Boom'? Continuous frustration is sort of the main point of the record."



Similar investigations also animate "Cede", a 40 minute tape composition on the 1995 *Terminal Pharmacy* album. On one level, the piece exhibits characteristic O'Rourke features: slow and deliberate instrumental passages woven with bouts of silence or nearly inaudible sound and complex layers of samples and electronic noise. But "Cede" is intended to explore a particular theoretical issue: whether or not it's possible to reconstitute a set of sounds by continuously deploying them over a single, extended work. With characteristic humor and insight, O'Rourke recounts how the idea for the piece came from his amazed reaction on hearing Foghat's raunchy blues rock classic, "Slow Ride": "The thing I like about that song is that at the beginning 'slow ride' is this truly veiled reference to some sex act," he says. "But through the continuous use of this in the song, and because the song is the scale it is — it wouldn't have worked if it were shorter — by the end of the song 'slow ride' is referring to the song itself during its actual existence, they're singing about the song. And so in 'Cede' there are these obvious concrete gestures in it, and I keep hammering these into the ground over and over, so that by the end of it, the final section is about everything that came beforehand and is just this big funeral for it."

"That's what I wanted to get," he continues, "but I don't think it was completely successful. It couldn't be. That's one of the things I learned, of course, while doing it — you can't make people think something. The only way I've found that you can completely create your own gesture is by killing somebody else's gesture. Murder is really the only gesture you can make."

**T**erminal Pharmacy staged the ritual murder not only of several musical gestures, but also of O'Rourke's obsession with tape composition and for a time, his desire to record self-penned compositions. But he continued to play and record collectively improvised music with such luminaries as Derek Bailey, Henry Kaiser, Gunter Müller, Mats Gustafsson, Eddie Prevost and Nicolas Collins. Given his penchant for critical self-awareness, O'Rourke's attraction to this form of music-making is obvious at its best: group improvisation presents a constant challenge to each player, modeling him or her to set aside personal or conventional patterns of playing in response to the immediate musical context. But O'Rourke is quick to criticize some of the self-deceptions of Improv ideology: for example, the fetishization of the live event, the fiction of musical spontaneity, and the scene's spurious affiliations with radical politics. "It's funny," he says, "because I hate going to improvised music concerts. I hate it. I just want to buy the record. I mean, you've got people who are playing for you who have years and years of thought and trial and error with this form of music. What they're giving you is information so dense that, unless you're fucking brilliant, you're not going to get all the possible trains of thought that are going on there."

If improvised music affords the possibility of constant personal and musical challenge, the sheer difficulty of genuine musical invention and the physical and psychic resistance to innovation too often pushes the performer in the opposite direction, so that what emerges "in the moment" is not the spark of the new, but the dead hand of habit.

"I'm always glad when someone makes me uncomfortable," Jim says, "and I would hope it's reciprocal. But it usually isn't. There are very few people who really hassle themselves on a regular basis. I mean the great thing about improvising is, when it really works, a real form of group composing can happen." But for the most part, he suggests, improvisers seem content merely to do "their schtick." "I make a distinction, and a lot of people in the improvised music world don't, between people who play

improvised music and people who improvise. I mean, I have no problem with either form of music. The problem I have is when people who play improvised music say they're improvising. I have no problem with the Evan Parker Trio. But they're not improvising. They're playing Evan Parker Trio music."

O'Rourke is equally repelled by the political pretensions of many in the free music scene. Once affiliated with social and economic collectivism, the European improvised music world, as O'Rourke sees it, has given way to greed, individualism and careerism. "You know this myth of the poor experimental musician? That's bullshit," he spits. "These guys make so much money. When I was starting to improvise a lot in Europe, once I started seeing that these people were making a career of it I couldn't get used to that — I thought it was wrong. Maybe it's my background, but I don't see why I should get flown to Zurich, play for an hour, improvise, and get 1,000 dollars on top of it, when a rock band who've worked for years to get where they are plays in front of a good-sized crowd and gets 200 bucks. It makes me feel wrong. I don't feel right supporting that kind of machine. So I just sort of dropped out of that scene. I'm not condemning people. It's just not right for me. For me it's an honesty issue. I still like doing it occasionally, but I don't like doing it professionally."



**O**n record, Jim O'Rourke's improvisational output shows no sign of slowing. *Table Chair And Harston*, his wonderfully quirky 1996 session with percussionist Gunter Müller and electronics weirdos Voice Crack, was released a few months ago, and further improvisations with Müller, Voice Crack and guitarist Loren Mazzacane Connors are due shortly. But more recently, O'Rourke's attention has been focused elsewhere. After a two year break (an eternity for this young and fantastically prolific composer), he recently released two records under his own name, *Happy Days* and *Bad Timing*. Both acknowledge the influence of two of O'Rourke's mentors (and collaborators) — avant folk guitarist John Fahey, whose *Revenant* label released *Happy Days*, and Minimalist violinist/composer Tony Conrad. But these are very different records: the former, perhaps the most difficult and relentless of O'Rourke's recordings, the latter, certainly the most user-friendly.

The single 40 minute track that makes up *Happy Days* pits a modest fingerpicking guitar figure against slowly accumulating layers of hardy-gurdy drones. At its peak, the piece mounts to a barrage of clashing overtones that is overwhelming in both volume and density. Played live, it takes on a performance element that recalls O'Rourke's earlier efforts at on-stage effacement and anonymity. Lit by the glow of a small lamp, O'Rourke sits alone consecutively plucking the guitar's upper and lower E strings five minutes in, at the sound of the first chord, and with no visible gesture from the guitars, a recorded hardy-gurdy drone enters. Slowly, further layers of hardy-gurdy drones are added until the guitar is entirely audible, though O'Rourke continues playing. And so it is for the next 30 minutes, until, abruptly, the invisible hardy-gurdys fade out and the guitar figure can be heard again for a few moments before withdrawing into silence.

*Bad Timing* is something else entirely — a collection of long and lovely fingerpicking songs replete with horn, string and pedal steel arrangements that reflect the influence of those late 60s oddball pop composers Van Dyke Parks and Jack Nitzsche. "It's the first record I've made of music," O'Rourke declares. Given his criticisms of so-called "music," it's difficult to know how to take this, but he seems sincere. "It's also the first overtly funny record I've made. Until recently, people thought I was some weird

serious person, which I'm not at all. At first it was going to be a serious record. It was going to be more like *Happy Days* — real overtone serious. But it just didn't ask for it once I started recording. Once I put the pedal steel in there, it was like, oh no, this is something else."

For all its surface prettiness and latter-day naivete, *Bad Timing* retains plenty of connections with O'Rourke's more experimental work. The fingerpicking rarely locks into a tune, and when it does, the tune promptly dissolves into a longform drone or is halted by organ swells and horn interventions. Midway through the final track "Happy Trails," for example, a somber solo guitar Country blues is interrupted by a blustery orchestral anthem. Two minutes later, the horns, strings and drums slow and retreat, allowing the acoustic guitar to take over briefly before joining the orchestra for a short, melancholy coda.

This new facility with lush arrangements is also evident in O'Rourke's latest work with Gastr Del Sol, the avant rock group for which he is best known in the US. Consisting of O'Rourke and David Grubbs with various guests, Gastr Del Sol has gained a reputation for turning out enigmatic patchworks of repetitive guitar and piano motifs, lyric fragments and electronic squalls that toy with the very structure of the "pop song," and effect a definitively postmodern synthesis between the acoustic and the electronic, folk forms and high art, silence and noise. Last year's *Upgrade And Afterlife* attracted plenty of mainstream press attention, and had the duo touring and performing for much of the year.

Such dedication to a single project and aesthetic seems to conflict with O'Rourke's protean sensibilities, and sure enough, upon completion of the group's forthcoming album, *Comefore*, he left Gastr Del Sol. "Gastr had become almost some damn business," he says. "I couldn't do anything else. It was just too much. It was really giving me an ulcer."

Over the past year, O'Rourke had also begun to feel that the group's experimental spirit had hardened into a calculated and formulaic avant-gardism. "Upgrade And Afterlife" was supposed to be our pop record, but it ended up not being. When we were working on it, I said, 'Can we please write a song that uses normal chords?' We don't know how to do that. Why are we continuing to do this? I mean, I'm not interested in writing *Crooked, Crook, Or Fly* [the first Gastr Del Sol record] over four times."

Compared to Gastr Del Sol's previous four records, *Comefore* deliberately goes over the top. Its multitracked vocals, sweet tunes and rich palette of trumpet, wolin, organ, accordion and pedal steel recall Buffalo Springfield-era Neil Young (whose orchestral opuses were notably produced and arranged by Jack Nitzsche) and contrast sharply with the angular austerity of those earlier records. "I'm sure a lot of people are going to think, oh, now I'm interested in all of this stuff," O'Rourke says. "But I've been listening to Jack Nitzsche and Van Dyke Parks since I was a little kid. I'm obsessed with these people. It just wasn't my place to do it yet."

Last one imagine that *Comefore* is some manifesto bid for the top of the charts, it bears mentioning that the record is also a collaboration with Oval, German audio-subobservers noted for their ability to milk down any musical material into a digital soup of looped hums, buzzes and clicks. Oval's contribution throws *Comefore*'s pop trajectory off kilter. Its low volume fits and starts provide an unsettling undercurrent



that is even more disturbing for the fact that it isn't foregrounded but sits in the mix alongside jazzy trumpets and hitting pedal steel — a conjunction that's as enigmatic and unnerving as anything Gastr Del Sol has recorded.

Asked about his plans for the coming year, O'Rourke pauses, as if genuinely trying to remember whether or not he'll be up to anything. After a moment's deliberation, he mentions that he's recently been asked to join David Belinfante and Takehisa Kosugi in the Mercer Cunningham Dance Company's music ensemble. "That's kinda nifty," he muses, "to be part of this tradition I grew up reading

about. And they're really nice to have. I'm OK enough to work with them." Having already completed production work on John Fahey's new *Wormhole* record and Faust's *Ren* album, an assignment that turned into a year-long nightmare of tape edits (see *The Wire* 1.45), he now reels off a list of imminent production jobs, among them Edith Frost, Loren Mazzacane Connors and Flying Saucer Attack. A 10" plunderphonics record, "Please Note Our Failure," will be out soon on Fire, a small Icelandic label. "I figured it was a way to put out something that otherwise I'd get sued for," he says. "Everything's lifted. There's nothing original on it." And following brilliant and wildly varying remixes for The Sea and Cake, Merzbow, Tortoise and Microtona, O'Rourke is looking forward to more studio remodeling. "I really love doing remixes. It's absolutely my favorite thing to do," he says.

"Everything I like doing is in one thing. I get material that's already culturally loaded, so I can deal with it in that regard. I get to do concrete stuff, which I love to do. It's always something different, so I have to really reconceptualize it every single time. I get to sit in my studio for two weeks working on a remix. I love it." Various other projects include a collaboration with sound and video artist John Duncan, and playing pop steel with digital noisemakers Peter Rehberg and Christian Fennesz from Vienna's Hlego label. After this torrent, he pauses again, quickly runs through his mental agenda, and concludes "That's about it." Jim O'Rourke's Web site: "hoobaloobalo," is at <http://pages.rpco.com/8080-mum/>.

#### same records

*Bad Timing* (Drag City, 1997)  
*Happy Days* (Reverent, 1997)  
*Table Chor And Hatstand* (with Gunter Muller and Voice Crack) (4 Four Ears, 1997)  
*Upgrade And Afterlife* (with Gastr Del Sol) (Drag City, 1996)  
*Terrain Pharmacy* (Tzadik, 1995)  
*When In Venetia* (with bise-glaci) (Skin Graft, 1994)  
*Remove The Need* (Extreme, 1993)  
*Rules Of Reduction* (Metamkine, 1993)

#### same remixes

The Sea And Cake — "I Took The Opportunity To Antique My End Table" on *Two Gentleman* (Thrill Jockey, 1997)  
 Merzbow — "House Of Kaya" on *Scumtron* (Blast First, 1997)  
 Microtona — "NAPM Weekend Pass Me" on *Reproducers* (Mile Plateaux, 1997)  
 Tortoise — "Reference Resistance Gate" (Thrill Jockey 12", 1996)



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Electronic music histories document instruments like the Theremin and the Ondes Martenot, but the **Trautonium** is the one that got away. Yet this proto-synthesizer was more advanced than either. Now only one man in the world can still play it — **Oskar Sala**, whose virtuosity won over Goebbels and landed him a job on Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Words: Georg Misch

A small bungalow in Berlin. A strange low frequency sound emanating from within is causing the front door to vibrate gently. Lining the bell and the nose immediately stops. A man, perhaps in his mid-eighties, opens the door with a big smile. "Ja, come in," says Oskar Sala, and ushers me into the inner sanctum of his studio. And there it is: the Trautonium. It might sound like an obscure radioactive element, but this is the name of one of the world's first electronic instruments. Like a church altar framed by two large loudspeakers, it dominates the room. Though it is similar in size and shape to an upright piano, the Trautonium looks more like a stone age computer than a musical instrument. Banks of switches, dials, buttons and display units tower over what you would call the keyboard — in reality, a wooden console with two strings suspended along an upper and lower metal rail. A tangled knot of cables connects the instrument with the various appliances that further extend its already dazzling palette of tones.

Invented over 60 years ago, the Trautonium and its more advanced model, the Mixturtrautonium, were the most complex of the early electronic instruments — including the French-made Ondes Martenot and the Russian Theremin. The Trautonium is all the more extraordinary for being developed in Germany during the Nazi period, when most forms of cultural experimentation were condemned as Entartete Kunst — Degenerate Art.

The analogue warmth generated by the Trautonium's obscure electronic circuits, and the unique sound that can be obtained from manipulating its fretless, stringed keyboard, allowing real-time control over all the instrument's parameters, cannot be obtained or imitated by even the most modern synthesizers. It more than impressed the members of Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk when they called on Sala, the grandfather of German electronic music, sometime in the 1970s. "But I don't know if I inspired them in any way," Sala smiles, quickly adding, "They certainly haven't built a Trautonium for themselves."

Now aged 87, Oskar Sala is the only living soul who knows how to play the last surviving Trautonium in circulation. His life's work is contained in the 600 reel-to-reel tape recordings which line a shelf running the length of his studio wall. And here I am in the studio waiting for him to give me a demonstration. But Sala seems oblivious to my mounting excitement and instead directs my attention away from the Trautonium to a wall covered with photographs — mementos of the past. The pictures trigger Sala's reminiscences. "Here," he says, "that's me with the master, Paul Hindemith." When he was 18, Sala recalls, he saw a performance by Hindemith, one of the major figures of German music in the 20s, at a concert hall in the small East German town of Greiz. Enraptured by what he heard, Sala was inspired to move to Berlin in 1929 to study composition under Hindemith. Six months later came the encounter that would determine the rest of his life.

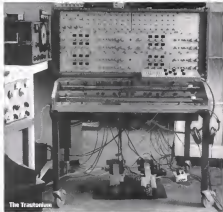
Hindemith, who had a keen interest in the cutting edge of musical developments, took his students to see a new electronic instrument, the Trautonium, named after its inventor, Friedrich Trautwein, a Cologne-based professor of acoustics. Trautwein's test set-up consisted of a wire-covered catgut string suspended over a metal rail and a box with some electronic circuits. "I think Trautwein considered his very simplistic construction more as a joke," smiles Sala. "He really wanted to build a sophisticated electronic organ — impossible at the height of the world economic crisis." But Hindemith could see beyond the prototype's ramshackle appearance to the revolutionary musical possibilities which a stringed, fretless electronic instrument would offer: microtonality, untuned tuning, a seemingly endless variety of tonal colours, unheard sounds! He encouraged Trautwein to continue his research and even

offered his students as volunteers to help speed up the work. Fascinated by the glissando sounds he'd heard, Sala volunteered immediately — the only one of Hindemith's students to do so — even though it meant studying physics alongside music to keep up.

At first, it was hardly glamorous work: he would spend days and nights soldering electronic components. "I had to become a virtuoso on the soldering iron before becoming a virtuoso on the instrument," he says. Together, Trautwein and Sala quickly developed the prototype into a playable instrument. For its public premiere, Hindemith had composed a set of *Troststücke Für Drei Trautonium* (Trio Pieces For Three Trautonium), which were performed by himself, Sala and Paul Schmidt, a professor at Berlin's music academy. Both the concert and the instrument were an instant hit. The audience was completely enraptured by their first experience of an electronic instrument capable of changing its timbral and tonal character over and over.

Listening to Sala's descriptions of the Trautonium's early impact makes me even more impatient to hear its alien beauty first-hand. I try to steer him away from the past and towards the instrument. But the history lesson is not over yet. In 1930 Arnold Schoenberg came to see the instrument. His criticism of its limited range inspired Sala to devise a system capable of covering the maximum octave range. By

this point he had become more and more involved in the instrument's development, and had all but taken over from its inventor, Trautwein. In 1934 the project received a boost from an unlikely source, when the Nazi-run German State Radio funded a new model, the Rundfunktrautonium (Radio Trautonium) and gave Sala his own weekly live radio show, *Music On The Trautonium*. With state funding, in 1938 Sala constructed a portable model, which enabled him to give concerts as far away as Budapest and Florence. Now Sala was performing with Europe's popular orchestras, and their resident composers would write special pieces for the instrument. The Trautonium was at the height of its popularity.



At long last, Sala seats himself at the keyboard — finally I'm going to get to hear this historic instrument for real. "Ja, now The Mixturtrautonium, to be precise!"

he says. "This is the latest model, this is Mixtur-elektronik!" Something crackles in the speakers. "Na, what did I do now?" puzzles Sala. Looking more like a NASA scientist than a musician, he starts adjusting a few controls. He lightly touches one of the two strings on the keyboard, and a sound of incredible beauty and warmth flows from the speakers. He turns a switch and the tone magically transforms into a chord. "Everyone knows harmonics, the overtones which you get with acoustic instruments or the human voice," Sala explains. "But the Mixturtrautonium can create the mirror-image to the harmonics, that's the subharmonics. No other instrument can do that!"

Sala developed this much more advanced version of the original Trautonium between 1948 and 1952. It retains all the basic sound characteristics of its predecessor but its polyphonic capabilities open up an even wider variety of sounds including, of course, the magical subharmonics. The machine he is playing right now is actually a copy of the tube version built in 1988, but fitted with state of the art microelectronics. The old model had grown too fragile and imprecise to play, and now stands in the Deutsche Museum in Bonn.

A subharmonic boom shakes the studio. "Oh, ja, ja, ja, that's a bit too much," warns Sala, and beats a few knots. A gentle glissando over several octaves follows. "The string acts as a variable electronic resistor," he explains. "When I press it against the rail and move it along like this, then it continuously changes the frequency of the tone generators and the pitch of the note."



Playing the Trautonium demands perfect coordination. The set-up allows Sala to play with absolute freedom of intonation, to glide from note to note, from microtone to microtone. The keys above the strings help the intonation of key notes. Sala simultaneously plays both these keys and directly on the strings in addition, he manipulates two foot pedals, which control the volume of each string. More importantly, he is able to select octave positions and pre-programmed subharmonic combinations by moving his feet sideways across the contacts on the pedals. This combination of strings, keys and pedals allows for a virtuosity, flexibility and depth of expression that few other instruments can match.

He starts explaining the Trautonium's technical specifications, but he quickly loses me in stark contrast to its technical complexity are the incredibly warm sounds Sala is now coaxing from the instrument — the kind that give you goosebumps. The Mostrautonium can also conjure the sound of supernatural bells, outlandish percussive noises and, after a little twist of a knob, human vowel sounds. Indeed, watching Sala improvising and pulling out all the stops, the sound variations seems endless.

It is remarkable to remember that the instrument producing these radical, fantastic, human-to-otherworldly tones was largely developed during the darkest, most conservative period in German history. How did Sala manage to maintain and perform on such a revolutionary instrument during the Third Reich, which forced so many of his contemporaries, among them Paul Hindemith, into exile?

Almost as soon as they came into power in 1933, the Nazis had started to persecute not only communists, Jews and homosexuals, but also artists who refused to fall in line with fascist cultural policy. The works of jazz musicians, progressive composers, Expressionist and abstract painters and writers were branded *Entartete Kunst*, and life became extremely difficult for them. "There were a lot of retributions against Hindemith," says Sala. "After his *Motus symphony* it became impossible for him to perform any of his music — all of it was labelled as degenerate. Disillusioned, he finally left Germany in 1937. That was a big blow for us."

Before his departure, Hindemith wrote a slow piece and rondo for the Trautonium, which he dedicated to Sala. "The two would meet just once more, after the war." Hindemith had become world famous by then and he was not interested in the Trautonium anymore, but he nevertheless wished me luck with it," says Sala with a slight hint of disappointment.

For Sala, whose life's work was already bound up with an almost untransportable instrument, the decision whether to stay or leave Germany wasn't so clear cut. After Hindemith's emigration, Sala continued working at Berlin's music academy, which he describes as a haven from the turmoil of the Third Reich. The way he talks about the period, it seems as if he was so caught up in the world of the Trautonium that he became oblivious to what was happening in the real world. But reality was bound to catch up with him. The Trautonium, with its strange electronic sounds and

experimental nature, was an obvious target for the Nazi culture legislators. "We started to have problems. There were fierce opponents of our work, who said that this electronic nonsense should be forbidden," he recalls. "Luckily, Trautwein knew a general who was on our side and arranged that we could demonstrate the instrument to the minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels — Hitler's right hand. I played something by Paganini, and of course he liked it. After that they left us in peace."

Once the project had won state approval, the electronics company Telefunken began manufacturing a simplified Volks-Trautonium, with the intention of putting an instrument into every German household. "Well yes, but they built only 100 of them and sold very few," says Sala. So did the German war effort put paid to the

Trautonium becoming the Volkswagen Beetle of music instruments? "Well, it was also that the Nazis did not want to have too much to do with us, because we were still too close to the old master, Hindemith," Sala replies. "So we were spared from becoming a part of the Nazi propaganda machine. Others were not. There was — what's his name? — Vierling, with his 'Kraft durch Freude Grossorgan' [Grand organ of strength through joy] — 'Strength through joy' being the slogan for one of the Nazis' mass propaganda leisure programmes]. He played it at the 1936 Olympics and other big propaganda events. Never heard of him after the war was over."

Sala, on the other hand, was drafted and sent to fight in Poland. He was injured but survived in a field hospital. "It really was luck that nothing happened to my hands or feet," he says.

Once the war was over, Sala returned to work on his new invention, the Mostrautonium. By this time he was no longer working with Friedrich Trautwein, who had joined the Nazi Party early on, in 1934. His membership cost him dear later, the stigma making it difficult for him to re-enter the de-Nazified post-war cultural sphere. Although the Cologne-based radio and TV station WDR bought the plans of the original Trautonium, Trautwein's Nazi past meant the station didn't want to work with him directly.

Eventually they built a relatively simple version of the instrument, but it was already 20 years behind the model Sala had developed on his own, his partnership with Trautwein long since soured. (Trautwein died a broken man in 1956.)

For his part, Sala had a clean record. After the war he linked up again with composer Harald Genzmer, another former student of Hindemith, who had written several pieces for him before the war. Genzmer was fascinated by the musical potential of the instrument's subharmonic mixtures and wrote a concerto for Mostrautonium and large orchestra, which was premiered by Sala and the Berlin Philharmonic in 1952. The Trautonium plays the lead with the orchestra answering in fortissimo. "The brass players, they loved that," Sala recalls, as we listen to a reel-to-reel recording of the concert. He begins conducting an imaginary orchestra. During a solo passage he gesticulates wildly, his hands gliding along an air-Trautonium.

Observing this amazing performance, I wonder why Sala never became a part



Oskar Sala with Alfred Hitchcock, 1963

of the electronic music scene that emerged in post-war Germany. Around the same time Sala was developing the Mixturtrautonium in Berlin. Karlheinz Stockhausen was breaking new ground in the electronic music studio of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne. Once again, Sala was so caught up in his own Trautonium-dominated world that he completely missed what was going on around him. In the end, maybe, he is a solitary type who thrives on working alone.

In the late 50s he began composing more himself. Over the following decades he amassed more than 600 pieces. He also started composing for film — a medium ideally suited to the Mixturtrautonium's soundworld — working on projects as diverse as steel industry promos, soap commercials and horror films. He also exploited the Trautonium's otherworldly qualities for a film about the Apollo moonlanding.

But the high point of his film career came several years earlier, in 1961, with his work on Hitchcock's *The Birds*. At the film's post-production stage, Hitchcock was unsatisfied with the synthetic bird noises that had been produced by Hollywood's sound technicians. "He was looking for something that really frightened people," recalls Sala. "Remi Gassmann, his composer, had been a student of Hindemith, so he knew about the Trautonium." Hitchcock duly sent Sala a trial scene. The director was so thrilled with the sounds Sala dredged from the Trautonium's circuits that he asked him to score the entire film. The result is a memorable soundtrack which contains no music as such. Once it was complete, Hitchcock travelled to Berlin to meet Sala and his machine. "I had prepared some settings on the Trautonium so that Hitchcock could play a little bit. He made a lot of nonsense and enjoyed it very much."

"So, this is my laboratory!" Sala announces, as he leads me into the room next to his studio. It looks like something out of a 30s Flash Gordon movie. "Here I can repair everything and also make a great chaos, as you could say." The room is filled with pieces of ancient equipment, film cans and boxes. One wall is occupied by two Steenbeck film editing tables, and the central space is dominated by a grand piano piled high with cables, electronic components — and the dust of decades. It seems the piano is only there for storage purposes. "Oh, the piano," says Sala. "When I was 18 I used to give concerts. Beethoven's piano concerto in E major. Quite difficult! But I think I intuitively said goodbye to the piano when I saw the Trautonium for the first time — and I haven't really bothered with it since."

Every morning, Sala still walks from his flat to the nearby studio, works until lunchtime, goes home to eat, and returns in the afternoon to continue playing, composing and experimenting deep into the night. When I ask him if he listens to music, he seems somewhat surprised by the question. "I don't have time for that," he answers. "I am much too busy." He checks himself a moment. "I had a lisp to what these young people do nowadays. You know, it's quite interesting." He cannot remember any names, but perhaps he is referring to some of the musicians associated with Peter Namick's Fax label, which has released two CDs (outside Germany) of Sala performing on the Mixturtrautonium, *My Fascinating Instrument* and

the recent *Subharmonic Mixtures*. "They start off with an interesting rhythm and then bring in a nice chord," he continues. "Sometimes somebody also sings a bit. But then nothing happens for two minutes until the next chord comes. So I have my finger on the fast forward button all the time. After another two minutes there is a third chord. I find that a little bit boring. On the Trautonium I play all of these chords as well, but at the same time."

Surprisingly perhaps, the sounds of the Trautonium haven't impacted on popular culture — the *Birds* soundtrack aside — in the same way as those of the Theremin. What did Sala make of its inventor? He answers by playing his *Hommage To Theremin*, simulating the instrument's ethereal sound perfectly, but also reproducing it polyphonically and in perfect pitch, which the Theremin can't do itself. Of his other contemporary, Maurice Martenot, Sala says: "Well, Martenot was a kind of a competitor at the time, but I saw the instrument five years ago and it is still the same as then, a nice, simple instrument. It has not been developed at all since it was invented."

Ironically, the uniqueness of the Mixturtrautonium might be responsible for its eventual extinction. Not only does Sala have the only working model left in the world, he is the only person who knows how to play it.

I ask him to play a piece from the *Subharmonic Mixtures* CD, "Glossando-Caprice." He starts with a *glossando*, which goes badly wrong. "Na, what is it with the fingers today?" It takes him several more attempts to get the opening section together — age and rheumatism have taken their toll on his technique. He chooses another piece, and his fingers seem to respond more quickly to the speed of his mind, once again coordinating with his footwork. His extraordinary virtuosity starts to shine through. But sadly, age has put some more demanding works beyond his reach. "Oh, the Genzmer Concerto for Orchestra And Mixturtrautonium — I can't play that anymore, not for years! What a pity. Can you believe that we played it only a few times in the 1950s? It hasn't been played since — such a great piece of music!"

The same fate threatens all of the composers for the Trautonium, and indeed, Sala's whole life's work. There is no heir in sight, nor is there anyone prepared to build another Trautonium. "Of course, I would not be pleased to have a novice hammering about on my instrument," Sala asserts. "What a student would need is his own instrument. I have tried everything but nobody seems to care about it." He tells me there is already a place reserved for his instrument in a Berlin museum. So will the most extraordinary of musical machines end up silenced behind glass, leaving nothing behind but the recordings? Oskar Sala sighs: "This instrument cannot die — maybe one day another wizard will come along to play it." Oskar Sala is due to appear at London's Goethe Institute in December. Since the Trautonium is too fragile to be moved, he will demonstrate the instrument with tapes, video footage and examples of his film work. Tel. 0171 411 3441 for details. My Fascinating Instrument and Subharmonic Mixtures are available from the Fax label (fax: 00 49 69 450 464, or through Ocu-Music; tel. 0121 248 2466). Independent film maker Georg Meier is presently completing a documentary about Oskar Sala under the working title *Trautonium* for release early next year.



**“The Nazis were fierce opponents of our work. They said that this electronic nonsense should be forbidden”**

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With their roots deep in the heart of Davis redneck, boogie hunkered, Texan groove Windsor For The Derby epitomize post-rock's problematic middle-child relationship with its oldest sibling. After grinning our way through ZZ Top's mighty Tapes album, I ask guitarist Dan Matz if he ever gets the desire to rock out. "We have some pretty rocking numbers," he replies defensively. Well, "Rush" and "Sweet Home Alabama" may personally annoy Matz's beards, but his group jump to a wholly different kind of beat.

What emerges from Windsor For The Derby's recordings is a far more poetic commingling of Davis and Gary Numan with Ry Cooder and Speedy West. Ry Cooder atomizes a lot of very simple guitar playing into very effective, difficult guitar playing, which Matz says Matz "He's not flashy. He uses a lot of weird drones and organic sounds... Maybe it's his sense of space. Maybe that's why we like him."

For all the spreading out of rock's forward motion and the diffusion of Davis's magic, peering across a more subdued Electro palette, Windsor For The Derby still somehow connect with the finest traditions of Southern rock. At least on the matter of deception. Just as Lynyrd Skynyrd named themselves after their high school gym teacher, and The Marshall Tucker Band immortalized the owner of their rehearsal space as Windsor For The Derby have called their new album Minnie Greuzfeldt. Nothing of any significance in the name — except to local listeners — other than the fact they listed it on a headcandle in the graveyard across the street from New Home's Aztec, but you can't help but to sense some influence from the death-trip finale of W.D.'s debut album.

# southern death cult

Texan post-rockers **Windsor For The Derby** have put a witty spin on the tombstone blues.  
Words: Peter Shapiro

Calm House Float. And musically, the new record follows the same trajectory of silky guitar meanderings and off-kilter bottom end, peppered with whispering commentary from unruly guitars at the recording session.

Indeed, one of the most striking features of their first record was the small universe of found sounds — atmospherically holed and reeling away in the cracks between the mesmeric interaction of guitars and "noise" (sampling keyboards, tape loops, etc.) But unlike some home-kimmed indie bottlers who waste valuable studio time sound-designing such atmospheres, Windsor's "Ambient" sounds were born by chance. "It's not by design," laughs Matz. "It's because we're poor. That whole thing came about because we have such minimal amounts of equipment and we were recording the album in [former producer/engineer, now WFTD member] Adam Witze's house. The first record came

out that way especially because we were using Radio Shack microphones and were actually picking up sounds from the outside. That's how it happened."

Minnie Greuzfeldt benefits from slightly improved production values, but the ad hoc attitude and grimy texture are still present, most notably on "Sieb", which features an intruder in the form of a Spanish speaker interrupting the song's introduction. "That Mexican radio thing was a surprise," alleges Matz. "It's the kind of thing you don't hear at first. I think the third time I listened to the album I was on the subway and I was like, 'What the hell is that? Where is that coming from?' I think it was Witze. It sounds like one of his tricks. He just stuck it in without telling us."

Matz has no trouble defining his group's sound: "When the average Joe asks what we sound like, I tell them it's like soundtrack music. People think stuff we do is very loose. In fact, the whole piece might be loose, but in crucial parts it'll come together."

In a strange spin on the "art mirrors life" axiom, their lax attitude towards musical structure parallels the group's living arrangements. Originally from Tampa, Florida, the members of WFTD gradually migrated to Austin. Witze was guitarist Jason McKinley both still live in Texas, while Matz resides in New York. And Greg Anderson, the group's original drummer, has been on hiatus for a year, so they now have two drummers on rotation — one in Texas, the other in New York. "Witze's house plays with us," they explain.

"Whenever we're all living together it was very strict," says Matz, recalling the time the group was actually in the same place at the same time. "We'd play four times a week, like, three hours a night. Now that we're doing that, the more time it's nice because we're sending each other all the tapes. Now there's a lot of tape manipulation, sampling parts instead of playing. We're constantly weaving all our songs in practice whenever we get together, we always rewrite them."

Living a mile or two miles apart, it's a wonder WFTD are able to even find a couch to play live gigs at at all. A makeshift venue is always open for Swans on their home turf. The band's first real tour, which Michael Gira co-wrote their next record, wasn't the best, but might not be apparent now, but Windsor heavily explored the same regions of explosive volume as Swans. "When we started out we were super loud," recalls him. "Our original guitarist was playing really loud, he had a half-stack of Marshall. I mean really loud? Listening back to those tapes it was just like high end. I don't know what we were doing. It was crazy... We still have some pretty rocking numbers. Sometimes in practice we'll break out some old Jesus And Mary Chain tunes for kicks."

When the group might try to reconcile their love for big guitars in the privacy of their rehearsal space or when they go all in onstage — they're playing a Halloween party dressed as Black Sabbath — their willingness to experiment with cheap technology is their true stock in trade. "We've had Black Sabbath samplers all along," contends Matz. "Besides, it's in all the magazines that electronic music is very popular right now." □ Minnie Greuzfeldt is released later this month on *Trance Syndicate* (through S90).





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# LEO LAB NEW RELEASES



## LEO LAB CD 033 RUSSIAN-GERMAN COM- POSERS QUARTET, NOT ONLY FOR...

Alexei Agi, Ivan Sokolov (Moscow, Russia), Dietmar Sonnen, Manfred Niehaus (Cologne, Germany) The four composers use a large variety of instruments: violin, viola, piano, prepared piano, synth, bells, choral samples, voices, accordion, etc. The CD is the result of their collaboration in Cologne and Moscow



## LEO LAB CD 034 JOHN WOLF BRENNAN MOSCOW-PETUSCHKI; FELIX-SZENEN

With this CD John Wolf Brennan fulfils the dream of many musicians. Two pieces are theatre productions staged in Zurich within one year on two very influential literary works by the Russian writer Wassilj Jerofejew and the Swiss author Robert Walser. Tcho Theising - violin, Daniele Patum - bass, Martin Mayer - French horn, John Wolf Brennan - piano, Martin Narmesnik - violin, Lars Lindvall - trumpet



## LEO LAB CD 035 MOSCOW COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA featuring SANKHO NAMCHYLAK / LET PEREMSLYK DREAM

This is the third CD by the Moscow Composers Orchestra on Leo Lab. It was recorded at the Unsung Music Festival in London, June 1996, and features the music of the leader Vladimir Miller and the trumpeter Vyacheslav Gulyovskiy. The performance of MCO was a "standing ovation" with the Tuvan throat singer Sankho Namchylak providing the highlights



## LEO LAB CD 036 NOT MISSING DRUMS PROJECT; URBAN VOICES featuring Laurin Newton, Joelle Leandre and Uschi Brüning

NOT MISSING DRUMS PROJECT is 12-member strong contemporary chamber/jazz ensemble performing without drums. The Project combines the structural richness of contemporary music with the vitality of jazz; it is a concept of chamber music which retains impetuous qualities. Urban Voices is all the verve and melancholy, nervous energy and the pleasures of a city



## LEO LAB CD 037 SATOKO FUJII ORCHESTRA, SOUTH WIND

The debut CD of Satoko Fujii "How Many" (with Natsuko Tamura) received outstanding reviews. This time it is Satoko's big band consisting of fifteen New York's musicians. The line-up is conventional, but there is nothing conventional or predictable about the music. Satoko belongs to innovators who try to blur the lines between composition and improvisation. liner notes by Stuart Bromer



## LEO LAB CD 038 ALATI, RELASI, RADAELE, SCIJANO I AM SURPRISED WHILE IT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING

The debut CD by the four young Italian musicians playing two guitars, percussion, drums, and bass. The music of this quartet is marked by a real sense of adventure. They surprise themselves, and one can actually feel their zest and pleasure of music making. Total duration 64 minutes

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## 4 Hero

Tested by Chris Sharp

4 Hero, aka Dego McFarlane and Mark Clair, have spent the best part of the last ten years exploring the possibilities of both the breakbeat and the pseudonym, recording as Tom & Jerry, Tek 9, Manix, Nu Era and Jacob's Optical Stairway, to name a few. Over the years they have embraced, and been influential across, the broad range of UK club culture: breakdancing, pirate radio, reggae sound systems, Happy House and rave, Jungle, instrumental HiHop, and jazz-inflected drum 'n' bass. In addition, their Reinforced label has released early tracks by some of the pivotal figures in UK club music, including Goldie, Josh Wink and Grooverider, and they have engineered and produced music for numerous other breakbeat zealots. They have just released a 12" on Soul Jazz's Satellite imprint in collaboration with Chris Bowden, and a mini-LP for Talking Loud, *Earth Pioneers*, which adds sweeping orchestral gestures to their intricate rhythm programming.

The Jukebox took place in their West London studio. Initially, Dego in particular was indifferent ("Some jukebox jury shit, right?"), and temporarily took leave from the studio. But as the test progressed, both began to express an infectious enthusiasm.

### HERBIE HANCOCK "Bubbles" from *Man-Child* (Columbia)

Mark: I don't know what this is — I thought it might be something new. I was thinking of Chris Bowden

It's Herbie Hancock, from the mid-70s.

I know it's always easy to say this, but I was going to say that... We did something for Kss FM yesterday, and we played a Herbie Hancock tune — it was at a similar tempo to this, but with vocals. Look around this studio [he indicates the formidable array of vintage electric pianos and synthesizers] and you can see the Herbie Hancock influence — he was one of those guys who always listed the keyboards on the back of his albums, and we've got a lot of that stuff right here [He checks off the keyboards against the album's sleeve notes]. The Arp Odyssey, the Oberheim Polyphonic

### WEST STREET MOB "Break Dancin' Electric Boogie" from *Best Of Electro Vol 1 (Street Sounds)*

Mark [immediately]: That's the "Apache" break, The Incredible Bongo Band  
Dego [suddenly returning to the room]: West Street Mob, Sugarhill record label

Mark [to Dego]: You would have got the Herbie Hancock one straight away

So would you have been breaking to this in 1982?

Dego: Oh yeah, all that shit, man. Tunes like this caused mayhem at the dances, everyone trying to get enough space for themselves to break in

Mark: It was reminding me of Grandmaster Flash, but I couldn't quite place it.

## WAYNE SMITH

### "Under M Sleng Teng" (Greensleeves 12")

Dego: Ah, "Way In My Brain," who did that? [He makes a grab for the sleeve]

Mark: You can't look at that yet! [Laughs]

[Dego embarks on a tangled set of associations to try and isolate the artist]

Dego: Finlay does his publishing

Mark: No, this guy got shot.

Dego: No, he's alive still. [To someone who's just wandered in] What's my boy's name, "Sleng Teng," the guy who done it? SL2 sampled it, remember? Can't remember the name

Wayne Smith.

Mark: Oh yeah, Wayne Smith. [To Dego] You were thinking of someone else, someone who copied the same rhythm track, because Wayne Smith is dead. Dego: I know! "huff" people copied it. This is the original, though. Is he the one got shot in the head? [A debate ensues as to the fate of Wayne Smith] Oh look, it, enough people got shot.

This one was the first digital dancehall tunes.

Mark: And you hear scratches of it in loads of Hardcore records. This was Prince Jammy at the controls, and I used to buy all those records like Prince Jammy versus The Scientist, all that stuff. The electronic sound was fresh then, and all the stuff that they used to do with the mixing desk — that came through, definitely, into early Hardcore stuff.

## JOHN BARRY

### "Midnight Cowboy" from *Midnight Cowboy OST* (CBS)

Dego: [Immediately] *Midnight Cowboy*. And remember, I got that on the first note — that should should be stated. [Laughs] And it's got all that "do-do-do-do-do" business on the other side. I don't know who the hell done the music, though, but I know the whole record. It's John Barry. A lot of your recent music sounds influenced by soundtracks.

Dego: We know our soundtracks, man. Me, personally, though looking for samples, from the days when you were searching for breakbeats and stuff — that just naturally leads to this after a while. Mark: The thing about soundtracks is that it's music made to go with images that already exist, and that just widens the whole musical scope.

## RHYTHM IS RHYTHM

### "Nude Photo" (Transmat 12")

Mark: It's got that "Washing Machine" sound.

Dego: Yeah, it's Larry Heard, isn't it? Oh no, wait a minute, it's Derrick May — not "Nude Photo." Yeah, it's "Nude Photo." Derrick May! And the years of experience of this group is coming through. [Laughs] Some shuffling backspin from the record! Tape edits! Now I'm spotting the tape edits, man!

You did a track with Juan Atkins on the Jacob's Optical

Stairway album — has that Detroit sound always been an influence?

Dego: Yeah, especially after we first met a lot of those guys, when we went there in 1991, '92. In fact, we met some of them before, in Germany. Underground Resistance, Mike Mills [sic: He probably means either Jeff Mills or Mad Mike]. But having said that, there's tracks like "Strings Of Life" that we obviously knew already. I used to wake up to "Strings Of Life" every morning, my sister playing it. I was like: Oh God, it's time to go to college!

Mark: That stuff was just out there — it's the same kind of feeling I got when I first heard "Planet Rock." We could do with another sound like that, you know, just popping up from nowhere.

Dego: Well, the last one to do that — they reckon — was drum 'n' bass, wasn't it? So we're just waiting for the next batch to just come along and go, fucking hell, man.

## GHERKIN JERKS (aka LARRY HEARD)

### "MeltDown" (Gherkin Records 12")

Mark: It's one of those records where you have to go by style, and it sounds a bit like Juan [Atkins]

Dego: Yeah, it does sound like Juan, a lot. This is Cybotron shit. No it ain't.

Mark: That snare sound is a bit weak for Juan, though. Dego: I'll tell you what it is, man, and that's old — this is pure lo-fi shit, not hi-fi. It's something from Detroit — or are we going to say Chicago?

Mark: Chicago.

Dego: No, because then it would be more Acidic, if it's old. Could be Kevin Saunderson. But the mix is a bit lo-fi.

When I played you the Derrick May track, from Detroit, the first thing you said was Larry Heard — who's from Chicago. This is Larry Heard — and you thought it was from Detroit.

Dego: It's on Trax, isn't it, with their shit, fucking recycled plastic.

Mark: See, that kind of works, because at that time, Chicago and Detroit were bouncing off each other — which didn't help us, listening to it! But the beats were out there.

## TIMEBASE featuring KROMOZONE

### "Unity" (Boogie Times 12")

Mark: It's European, yeah?

Dego: It sounds like Shades Of Rhythm and early

Prodigy, back in them days — could be any of them things, round that time. This is some '91, 1990 shit.

It's on Boogie Times.

Dego: Not Danny Breaks, all that crew.

Mark: That was the one we did that remix of?

Dego: Some Of A Loop Da Loop Era — but I don't know who this is.

It's Krome & Time.

[Laughs]

You got the Essex connection, anyway.

Dego: Yeah, and we knew the year!

Mark: We started making music about '89, and there was a scene going on that we didn't really know existed, and then we found out that our stuff fitted in. Dego: London at that time had a bit more of the Hip-Hop influence — like Shut Up And Dance, it had a different kind of edge to it, compared to this.

## RONI SIZE

### "Timesretching" (V Recordings 12")

Dego: Pitchbending going on in this one — that makes it new, or at least after '93. We know it's after '93.

Why?

Dego: Because we know who done pitchbending first and timesretching first. Ain't got a clue who it is, though.

Mark: You could play this today, though, whoever it is.

It's Roni Size.

Mark: How long ago?

1993.

Mark: Yeah, it could be.

Dego: How long are the years, eh, Mr Size? [Laughs] It's called "Timesretching".

Mark: And we actually pointed that this was someone trying to make a point of timesretching! Dego: See [Upturnous laughter]

Tell me about timesretching.

Dego: Timesretching is just a tool to sort out certain things, we just used it a little bit differently. The thing is that we done it on a couple of records and then just moved on — timesretching beats and then moving on to whatever else it was that we wanted to do next. And then there was a whole batch of records that came out afterwards, timesretching for the next eight months they were! For us, it was like, yeah, done it, go on, you know what I mean? There's not really that much more you can do with that shit.

Mark: Can I hear that at 33, pitched up to plus eight? [Lustens] Yeah. Around about that time a lot of the Americans were playing our stuff at 33.

## SQUAREPUSHER

### "2" from *Burning 'N' Tree* (Warp/Spymania)

Dego: [as soon as the bass comes in] Squarepusher

How did you get that?

Dego: I can tell from the tempo.

Mark: And the way he uses the fireless bass. [Laughs] Dego: Straight away! And if I hadn't got it then, I would have got it when the drums really started, because he's got a bit of a habit in the way that he EQs the drums.

[The drums come in] Yeah, that's Squarepusher all right! What do you think of this kind of stuff?

Dego: The beats could be sorted out a bit, they're a bit too much for me — I like the bass playing. He has some bad shit in these records, mad shit.

Mark: He likes programming, I tell you that much!

For some people, this is the future of drum 'n' bass.

Mark: The thing is that anything is possible, or should be, anyway. We're getting to the year 2000, and people used to ask: what's music going to sound like in the year 2000? And we're lucky enough to be responsible for making it. □

# charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

## Wired For Sound 15

**Tim Risher** — The Only Reality Is In Your Head (Discus)  
**Culture** — Lazybones/Mark Of The Beast (Ras)  
**Mad Professor** — I Am A Madman (Ras)  
**Lee Scratch Perry** — Anti-Racist Broadcast (Maritime Hall)  
**Aphex Twin** — Come To Daddy (Warp)  
**John Fahey** — Sherks (Table Of The Elements)  
**The Duke Of Haringgay** — Sarcaod Part 1 (Caprinha)  
**Coldcut** — Return To Märgen (Ninja Tune)  
**United Future Organisation** — His Name Is (Antilles)  
**Sect** — Evanescent/Eustor (Subduction)  
**Phoma** — Black (Subduction)  
**Stellamara** — Kereshme (City Of Tribes)  
**Squarepusher** — Burning In Time 1 & 8 (Warp)  
**Plaid** — Abba Edda (Warp)  
**BeatSystem** — Inside Areas Where Nothing's Definite (EMI)  
*Compiled by Chris Melchoir, CHRW 94.7 FM, London, Ontario, Canada, Mondays 10pm-midnight*

## Night Ragas 15

**Ahara** — Babe Taher (Nightingale)  
**Harcel Khalife** — Jaddi Oud Duo (Nagani)  
**Joe Zawinul** — My People (Escapade)  
**Lingkuang Seni Halati** — Tembang Sunda (Celestial Harmonies)  
**Pandit Shivkumar Sharma/Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia** — The Valley Recalls (Navras)  
**Daniel Biro** — Soho Square (Sargasso)  
**Martin Simpson/Wu Man** — Music For The Motherless Child (Water Lily Acoustics)  
**Various** — The Kings & Queen Of Qawwal (Shanachie)  
**Emmanuel Top** — Astored (Mute)  
**Sylvia Richter/Daniel Kobalika** — Silver Linings (Cymbich)  
**Karimeh Novhassianian** — The Music Of Armenia Vol 4 (Celestial Harmonies)  
**Various** — Yemen (Playasound)  
**Viram Jasani/Gurdev Singh/Ustad Latif Ahmed Khan** — Rags, Maltians And Meah (Saydisc)  
**Various** — The Listening Room-Alpha (ABC)  
**U Srinivas** — Rama Snerama (Real World)  
*Compiled by Martin Ben Israel, Night Raga Music, OY The Grid, Radio 200, Canberra, Australia, Sundays 10pm-3am*

## Electrotherapy 15

**Somewhere In Europe** — Under The Sun (NER)  
**Protopase** — A Day At Death Seaside (Radar)  
**Eintrázende Neubauten** — NNHAAHIM (Panasonic Remix) (Mute)  
**Coil** — Wrong Eye (Threshold House)  
**Tonart** — Kurze Himmelmelodie (Tonart)  
**Evergreens** — Part One (Captain Trip)  
**Terre Thaemlicz/Material** — Soul Killer Remix (Trioka)  
**Swans** — I Wanna Be Your Dog (Young God)  
**Patti Smith** — Spell (Arista)  
**Paul D Miller** — Invisible Ocean (Asphodel)  
**Ax** — Heavy Fluid (Freak)  
**WS Burroughs** — What Keeps Mankind Alive (Sony Classical)  
**Heroin** — Symbolic Wounds (Ultra 5)  
**Cabaret Voltaire** — Here She Comes Now (Mute)  
**The Bug** — Room 773 (Wordsound)  
*Compiled by Frank Kleis, Progress Report, Radio 8100Q, Sussex University, Thursdays 10pm-midnight*

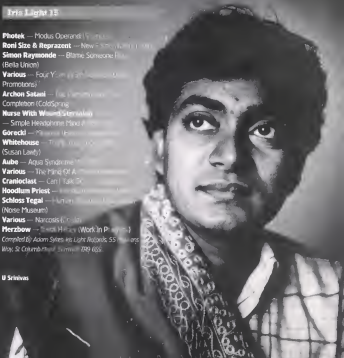
## The Office Ambience

**The Fall** — Levitate (Artful)  
**Alec Empire** — The Gels Of... (Gest)  
**Phil Smith** — Peace And Noise (Arista)  
**Comelade/Bastien/Bercoval/Libezait** — Oblique Sessions (Evel)  
**Don King** — One-Two Punch (Atavistic)  
**The X-ecutioners** — X-pressions (Asphodel)  
**Ulrich Krieger** — Walls Of Sound (OO Discs)  
**Yabby U** — Jesus Dread (Blood & Fire)  
**Chessie** — Signal Series (Dropbear)  
**Anthony Manning** — Concession (Irdial)  
**Various** — Disco Moonlight (Worm Interface)  
**Max Magi** — Super B (Rude Noises)  
**Alvin Lucier** — Panorama (Lovely Music)  
**Yamano Tone** — Solo For Wounded CD (Tzadik)  
**Free Kitten** — Sentimental Education (Wija)  
**Sofa Surfers** — Transit (ahead)  
**House On Mars** — Instruments (Song)  
*Compiled by The Wire Sound System*

## Irish Light 15

**Photek** — Modus Operandi (Vanguard)  
**Roni Size & Reprazent** — New B (Stony Hill) (V2)  
**Simon Raymond** — Blame Someone Else (Bella Union)  
**Various** — Four Years (Irish Music Centre Promotions)  
**Archer Sotani** — Eric (Various Artists) (Various)  
**Nurse With Wound/Sterling** — Simple Headphone Music (Various)  
**Gorecki** — Muzyczna (Various)  
**Whitehouse** — The King Of The Castle (Susan Landy)  
**Aube** — Aqua Syndrome (Various)  
**Various** — The Mind Of A Musician (Various)  
**Cranioclast** — Can I Talk To You (Various)  
**Hoodlum Priest** — Kerkira (Various)  
**Schloss Tegal** — Kerkira (Various)  
**Various** — Narcosis (Various)  
**Perzbow** — Break Horses (Work In Progress)  
*Compiled by Adam Sykes, Irish Light Records, 55 Newburg Way, St Columb's Park, Burren, BT9 6GG*

U Srinivas



# sound check

Up too late: November's selected albums



On the one: Kirk Degregio reviewed below

## Arcon 2

The Beckoning  
REPROCESSED MISHON CD/LP

## Omnitrio

Skeleton Keys  
MOVING SHADOW ASHROCK 10 CD/LP

Leon Marx's debut LP under the Arcon 2 identity seems to share much with Proteus's recent *Modus Operandi*, despite sounding nothing like it. Where it finds common ground with Rupert Parker's work is in the importance placed on the actual sound of the sounds. Rhythmic figures are constructed with painstaking precision, exploring the timbral and tonal qualities of the beats themselves. Chopped up to a level of almost fractal complexity, then sent spinning through a tunnel of delays, reverb and effects units, they achieve a totally dizzying effect. The title track itself is startling: this vortex of high-frequency ferocity and sub-bass portent looms, you grasping for something to cling to. And out of the maelstrom emerge spectral glades — ghostly melody lines that seem to fall as residue from the rhythmic storm. At times it feels as if these strange new melodies are struggling to break free, by-products of a bigger experiment. In this non-linear, organic

approach to the evolution of sound, The Beckoning resembles *Lifetimes* by Future Sound Of London (for whose EBV label Marx records as Oll) that album was heralded as a landmark in the then burgeoning field of Ambient. The Beckoning seems destined to occupy a similar, lofty place in the still unfolding story of drum 'n' bass.

The third LP from the redoubtable Rob Haigh (aka Omnitrio) operates at the other end of the emotional spectrum from The Beckoning. If the former record documents a long dark night of the soul, *Skeleton Keys* conveys a feeling of happier times. But unlike the adrenal joy of anticipation that propelled the early Jungle records, including Haigh's own blistering "Renegade Snarls", this is a joy of a deeper kind: the joy of contentment. Haigh has spent three albums distilling the very essence of his music to the point where it stands outside any tribal labels. *Skeleton Keys* confirms the purest drum 'n' bass you'll hear. Not a beat, a melody or an effect is used superfluously. It's the work of an artist completely at ease with his ability, pushing himself only as far as limits that he himself has defined. To the casual listener, immersed in a world of new complexity, jungle — isn't it worrying how the progress of drum 'n' bass seems to be mirroring that of Techno? — this

may sound sparse, simplistic, even quaint. But what's so great about complexity anyway?

PETER HUMFREY

## As One

Planetary Folklore  
MO' WAX FM0683 CD/LP

Sleeped in an obsessive love of jazz and soul, Kirk Degregio has long struggled to break free from the Techno label that has been lazily and carelessly attached to his work. With *Planetary Folklore* the tide is taken from a series of Victor Vassarelli paintings, maintaining the Qs-art theme which runs through Degregio's As One project, he should finally slip those shackles. Just.

This is Degregio's attempt to make a jazz album (or rather, a digitised jazz fusion album) utilizing technology in tandem with live input from, among others, drummer Ollie Teeba from The Herbaliser. And for the most part, it works. It certainly represents a quantum leap, bringing into plain view influences only glimpsed on his previous work.

Particularly impressive is the drum sound, which is as far from the pristine cleanliness of pre-programmed digital rhythms as you can get. Degregio seems to have absorbed the

## Reviewed this month:

**0161** *Anthology Of American Folk Music* **Arcon 2** Robert Ashley **As One** Atman **Howie B** Derek Bailey & Tony Oxley **Derek Bailey & Andrea Contazzo** Besch Boys **Borah Bergman** Anthony Braxton/**Peter Brötzmann**/Andrew Cyrille **Adam Bohmian** Gavin Bryars **Christopher Cauley** **Company Flow** Eric Dolphy **Dargón & William Parker** Dummy Run **Euphone** John Fahey/Cut De Sac **The Fall** Guitars On Mays **Jessamine** Jurnman V **Spacer** **Musrat** **Fateh Ali Khan & Michael Brook** Labradford **Steve Lacy** Rune Lindblad **Alvin Lucier** Macunas Ensemble **Merzböw** Nils Peter Mölvar **Morphogenesis** Pauline Oliveros **Omnitrio** Evan Parker & Lawrence Casserley **Evan Parker & Ned Rothenberg** William Parker & Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra **Ivo Perelman & Borah Bergman** Ivo Perelman & Joe Morris **Courtney Pine** Pizzicato Five **Plug Research G** **Development** Folke Rabe **Rhildand** Skomper **Patti Smith** Spaces **Spirit Of Vampyras** Lesbos **Rob Swift** **Toru Takemitsu** Terre Thaemitz **David S Ware** **Quartet** Jah Wobble **X-ecutioners** Z-Rock **Hawaii plus round-ups of new classical, jazz, electronica, outer limits and rock releases**

## soundcheck

spect of Max Roach, specifically his Members Don't Get Worry UP, to produce a rough, transient sound, which incorporates the natural ambience of the recording environment — i.e., his. Sample manipulation or studio still isn't a sound Rudy Van Gelder would surely have approved of.

Above the drums, however, things are a little more uncertain. A track such as "Soul, Soul, Soul" isn't somewhat uncomfortable, because the electronics and the rhythms remain absolute, freed in their own particular frames of reference. When Dogorgo makes concessions, though (roughing up the former and smoothing out the latter — as on "The Path Of Most Resistance"), the result is an interesting hybrid: future funk from an alternative past.

The record's best moments come when Dogorgo dispenses with electronics completely (at least in terms of sound), matching mood to movement through the use of "real" instruments. Both "Liban Legacy" and "Amelia's Mode" evoke the feel of his beloved late-60s jazz recordings with almost uncanny accuracy. That same passion is responsible for "Away From All Of This," Dogorgo's first attempt at a vocal track. It's a little one-dimensional, but the interplay between words and music suggests a strong understanding of the dynamics of songwriting. It's definitely an avenue he should explore further — and one that is infinitely preferable to the record's purely electronic bookends, clearly added solely for CD consumption. No love there — and shows Next time out Dogorgo should be braver and follow his heart rather than his head.

PERCY MONTGOMERY

### Altman

Personal Forest

DRUNKEN FISH OPR 33 CD

### rhBand

Third Order Parastitosis

DRUNKEN FISH OPR 33 CD

From San Francisco's Drunken Fish label (rapidly becoming the premier West Coast space rock stopover) comes a pair of locally associated all-improvised, Zen-inspired, pseudo-deconstructive works.

Altman will be at least vaguely familiar to obsessive underground (female) readers through eclectic reviews of their previous *Sundaysuits LP* and *End Of Philosophy?* If an Obdu didn't know if any copies ever surfaced here, none of which, however, are any substitute for actually hearing the staggering collective of work from Poland. Altman associate themselves with the Eastern European Deep Ecology movement, which promotes various kinds of workshops and ecological retreats in an attempt to forge some kind of planetary awareness. Claiming to draw inspiration from "occurrences, people, wild places, forests and landscapes" their music is unsurprisingly very organic. The bulk

### Robert Ashley

Atlanta (Acts Of God)

LOVELY MUSIC LCO 3301 2 CD

At a time when much music is made and written about as though it were a form of surrogate cinema, it is interesting to find something which so resolutely does not evoke, nor aspire to evoke, image as its adjunct. This mammoth opera by the much overlooked American composer Robert Ashley takes his interest in linguistics and the voice to extraordinary heights. The mesmerizing communion of sung and spoken word evokes a geometry of communication which is profoundly evocative and at times almost architectural in the structures it implies. This is music which connects directly with ideas without dwelling in images and abstractions. Sound about communication seems a basic enough idea, but the impact of this CD release indicates that this is a relatively unfamiliar territory.

*Atlanta* is the second in a cycle of three operas (*Perfect Lives* and *Now Being's Idea* being the first and third) which have defined Ashley as the single most important figure in American experimental music theatre. While early work such as the sublime *Automotive Wiring* is strikingly minimal in its structure and layering of elements, the operas — particularly this one — are complex. It takes many listenings to explore the levels which Ashley combines effortlessly in his librettos. It has to be said also that he is a fine writer of prose and the depth of these works reflects the quality of a highly developed literary mind as well as that of a first rate composer. Having read the libretto several times now, I can say that the text is as inexhaustibly rich as that of *Perfect Lives* (John Cage said of that opera: "What about the Bible? And the Koran? It doesn't matter: we have *Perfect Lives*").

But to attempt to describe the libretto of *Atlanta* here would be folly. Suffice to say it transposes the consequences of a Greek myth into the present and then introduces Max Ernst, William Reynolds and Bud Powell as archetypes into a scenario in which they vie as suitors for the affections of Atlanta, who is (of course) a leopard. This all unfolds in simple language but with complex structures. Ashley's trademark leonine mix of bar room keyboard deconstructions, cheesy string pads and ominously simple rhythms, force the texts into relief. One thing has always

of *Personal Forest* consists of tracks originally issued on vinyl by the German Lollipop label with the addition of some truly transcendental pieces recorded "out in the open" on their 1994 *Sea Entry* tour.

All acoustic. Altman utilize Mark Jaki's harp and delgados, play the Tibetan musical instruments and handmade wooden inventions to create a uniquely open and all encompassing series of free improvisations. Parallels are low, but perhaps a *Household Witch's Ghost* circa Second Time Around and *Tenpore Space* are as close as you'll get to the microscopically-dimensioned ethnic folk moves within.

RhBand, hailing from the other side of the world (Venice Beach, California), take the opposite route to Nirvana with their

improvisers built round the steady rise and fall of deep industrial electronics and circuit-driving static. You probably know the score — subliminal crackle and drips through sheets of feedback and throb, but there's an ineffably benign air to the proceedings, similar almost to the peaked works of Simon Willmet-Smith and Richard Youngs. Despite their 'alien valley' backdrop and penchant for obsolete technology (Wurlizers, ballroomers and modular feedback generators are all namechecked), the same deep, organic atmosphere of the Altman disc is never betrayed and every track is suffused with a seemingly purposeful and focused improvisation ethic.

Modern day devotions, hymns to the



amused me about his work: where many composers would bury or obscure the (often meaningless) libretto under volumes of irrelevant musical fanfare, Ashley, in affirming the importance of his own fascinating texts, has developed uniquely accommodating musical devices. This characteristic alone renders his work remarkable. There is a sense of casual enormity about the operas, a kind of gentle and inviting vastness in which it is pleasurable to lose oneself and which rewards the explorer constantly.

The level of information in the text of *Atlanta* can threaten to engulf the listener, and it is only because much of this particular performance is in Italian that we are saved from overload. The Italian elements wash over the ear sonorously (unless of course you understand them), and you're left with that fantastic sense of familiarity without specificity which comes from the patterns in language.

In the end, Atlanta deflates my attempts at explanation or definition, and that is because Ashley has succeeded in making a complex artefact which transcends its parts completely.

PAUL SCHÜTZE

forest and city, they don't come much better than this pair of discs.

DAVID REEHAN

### Derek Bailey & Tony Oxley

Solo Sutter

WIGGS CD 29 30 30

### Derek Bailey & Andrea Cantafano

Drops

KICS 5073 CD

One sympathizes with those who find this music hard work: its passion measured out

over vast distances, its rewards as often hidden in obliquities as in any kind of big bang. Not that Tony Oxley has ever been shy of any sort of nomenclature, which makes his syncretic partnership with the perennially considered Bailey of the kind of unlikely logic which turns up at the time in longstanding Improv releases: *Sono Suites* a two CD set pairs a 1977 London studio recording with a 1995 New York concert, and few who have lent an ear to these performers over the years will be surprised to hear that the threads seem to stretch without any undue strain from one tempo to the other.

The only obvious difference between the two occasions is in the methodology. In 1977 Oxley was battering away at a vital kit, part acoustic, part amplified, with ring modulators and active settlers set alongside his woodblocks and cowbells. Even Bailey was playing a stereo electric guitar, its sounds sometimes stretching across the soundstage of the music. In 1995, Oxley sounds like he's tapping at a much smaller and certainly all acoustic set-up, while Bailey contents himself with a relatively normalised electric guitar. Not that any of the ten improvisations herein are especially dictated by these circumstances. The 22 minutes of "Carlisle" (1977) for instance sound to be no more or less gripping than the 34:07 of "Lafayette" (1995). But there are differences, and they say something about how the music has grown alongside its practitioners. Where in the older music Oxley and Bailey seem more concerned with atmospheric overall shape, even some kind of result, the later pieces seem to be even less listened, more playful, perhaps more — dare one say it? — improvised. After more than 30 years of working together one can hardly ask for either man to surprise the other, or indeed the listener. Nothing happened on either session to jolt me out of my familiarity with the two musicians. Neither, though, is this the cosy, glowing pleasure one gets from, say, *Zoot Sims* or *Pharoah Sanders*. The music, recorded for players and listener alike, are hard-won, scrupulous, even when there is a certain conspiratorial delight which the two men display in each other's company — as when in New York, they clap a false ending (which the audience applauding prematurely with a clatter that has an element of Grand Funk Railroad about it).

Maybe the larger difference between the two dates is simply in the way they sound. Keith Spencer-Alien did a decent job engineering the older music, but it sounds likey next to the crispness of James McLean's New York mix. At least the earlier music evokes the historic document feel of *Drums*, a further rescue from percussionist Antonio Carrazzo's old *Idus* catalogue (which like other vinyl outputs such as *Hiro, MetaLanguage* and original ICP, I never expected to see on CD). Bailey is on snapping form in these undated 70s tracks, but Carrazzo himself is just as languid as he is on all the other *Idus* releases, tagged out peculiarly irrelevant terrors to the hercelty pointed guitar parts. At least it sounds better than the

horrible old *Idus* vinyl ever did, but I doubt it'll be listening to it again.

Will *Sono Suites* demand many returns to the laser? With Bailey suddenly ubiquitous in the racks, one can start to be choosy about his records: though there is less of such a luxury with Tony Oxley. This one might go down as a little bit of history but it stands as a beautiful double-sided debate. Since there has been some discussion about stereotyping in this area of last, maybe we can do by pondering this, how did these two bluff old Yorkshiremen end up playing such delicate, sinewy, ambiguous music as here?

RICHARD COOK

## Borah Bergman/Anthony Braxton/Peter Brötzmann

Right By Three

HEXTER MOOT CD

## Borah Bergman/Peter Brötzmann/Andrew Cyrille

Each for a son

VOL NOTE 121 330 CD

Anthony Braxton once said for so it was reported: "I never talk about feeling, and haven't tried to address the emotional aspects of the music." And he's work catalogues are as fearlessly clever and predominantly cerebral so I find it convenient to believe that the limitations of any response are due to his calculated omission of certain elements rather than my inability to tap in to everything that there is in fact in the years since this confession Braxton has demonstrated a readiness to address emotions, if not to embrace them. Though he remains an artist who lines up with the intellectual rather than the intuitive, this season from April 1996 shows that he's still willing and well able to mix it in the empire of the extemporary, abandoning his customary complicated schemes, systems and structures for something more spontaneous.

Peter Brötzmann proclaimed: "I like to be totally pumped out after a gig, so the mind is empty and the body is falling apart." No one sleeps when Brötzmann is on, and even if you could, who knows what dreams? He can define and describe ideas as well as the next contrabass soloist, but he prefers to provoke and experience feelings. The intensity of his playing isn't just a matter of sheer volume or ferocity of attack, and he's not bad on speed of articulation. What's so impressive, and so intimidating, is the way he uncompromisingly initiates every note. There's no fading of the full, resonant tone even at the extremes of dynamics and pitch. He makes each sound concrete, not an insubstantial vibration in an incorporeal medium but something solid that bruises. Even on what might, at a stretch, pass for ballads, there is a robust physicality which constantly threatens to bust into unrestrained. Beard-wearing Brötzmann is the impact monster from the id, the avatar of the visceral, the croaker of the

moderate, prudence's nemesis, Ron's genderer, the emotional assaulter of the 13 precincts of the nervous system.

If I wanted to labour the metaphor, Borah Bergman would probably have to represent the ego, or do I mean relief? On *Right By Three*, his piano meditates between two worlds, species both tongues simultaneously, pausing out the rhythmic demands of instinct, pointing complicated lines of reason between the contending voices of Braxton on soprano, also, flute, contrabass clarinet. Brötzmann on alto, tenor, clarinet and tragato. On the *Sono Suites* disc, recorded live at the Kröning Festival, he seems more elemental, oceanic. Drummer Andrew Cyrille's CV qualifies him as keeper of the canonic tradition. In his skilled care, the drum, stereotypical symbol of primitive impulses, becomes the subtle overseer, deftly re-focusing the more discursive tendencies until he drops out to let the others settle (and I quote) "man to Man".

BARRY WITHERS

## Gavin Bryars

A Man In A Room, Gänßling

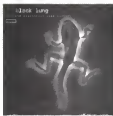
POINT PLUS 455 514 CD

Gavin Bryars conceived *A Man In A Room* Gänßling, a collaboration with the sculptor, Juan Muñoz, as a kind of short concert, to be heard on the radio, each lasting five minutes. Muñoz, speaking in heavily accented English, offers advice to card sharks while The Gavin Bryars Ensemble plays Bryars' heavily uncentred music, sometimes in the background, sometimes in the foreground, most often sure what to play attention to.

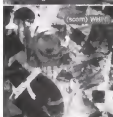
It's a playful work, which can't say it's not profound. Bryars likes the hope for experience of the listener, suddenly coming across the work on the radio, to that of listening to the Shipping Forecast, which British radioophiles will know is an eerie litany of strange yet familiar names (Dogger, German Bight and the rest). The only way *A Man In A Room*, Gänßling could hope to be heard in the same way, it seems to me, if you take the CD to yourself, preferably at a set time, over and over again. It's rather a great while to call.

The CD offers five of the ten pieces, supplementing them with three purely instrumental works that, substantial enough in their own right, never quite match the quality of *A Man In A Room*, Gänßling. Indeed, the cumulative effect is part of that work's appeal. The music is generally slow and sombre, rarely providing any kind of commentary. One exception occurs in the fourth piece, when Muñoz advises us to "snap the last" card, at which precise moment the strings echo the emphasis on "snap" with their own descending line. For the most part, Bryars avoids such literalism, preferring instead a deep, resonant thrum dominated by the low strings, lending an emotional weight to proceedings which Muñoz's text does at pains to efface.

There's the appeal of the piece, I think.



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## The Beach Boys

The Pet Sounds Sessions

CAPTOL, CPMPO5-5-4-00

Here's everything you ever wanted to hear about The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* — from an alternative "God Only Knows" featuring a grotesquely banal sax break, to an out-take of barking by Brian Wilson's dogs. Stretched over four CDs — including a remastered mono version and a brand new stereo remix — this package ought to look like pop bureaucrat feverism of the worst kind, but in fact it's a thoroughly enlightening and welcome document, or "audio documentary," as it's called in the press notes.

More than any other pop record, *Pet Sounds* benefits from such breaking down and annotating, for at least two reasons. One, because of the extraordinary density of the arrangements and instrumentation: there's so much happening in any one track that hearing first the backing and then the a cappella vocals makes for an experience that's considerably more than academic. And two, because so much mystificatory rhetoric has been spouted about the record's revolutionary complexity that this is the first real opportunity to sit down and figure out how it was done.

There's plenty of gut in the notes about Brian Wilson's "genius" and "spirituality," and desire to cure the listener with love. Well, fine, and if any pop record gets near to evoking ecstatic sublimity (as well as unease and heartache and the rest), this is it. Yet it has still been possible, only recently, for one prominent music writer to praise *Pet Sounds* "sonorizing but complain about the backing being 'shapeless debris'." If nothing else, this package removes the element of impenetrability that attaches to the mono mix, and proves that the writing can't be separated from the totality of the music (the piano demo for "Don't Talk," included here, doesn't yet remotely resemble the song that the strings and organ will reveal).

That's why the stereo mix is such an ear-opener. After some 25 years of listening to *Pet Sounds*, I can hear things I'd at best half-registered — a strangely stilled RMB sax line in "Here Today," a guitar part in "Wouldn't It Be Nice" that goes on longer than is strictly necessary for such an apparently

simple number, making you realise the unexpected extra amplitude that Wilson crammed into his sound.

The sleeve notes struggle apologetically with the arguments for viewing the stereo mix as anything other than an educational tool, and admit that the idea might seem as outrageous as a coloured Citizen Kane. This feels like false modesty — on nearly all tracks, stereo brings a new assertiveness and reminds you that this was music played in a studio by musicians, rather than a mass of sound that suddenly, mystically congealed on tape. The one track actually damaged by stereo is the gorgeous "Don't Talk," where Brian's vulnerable voice at the centre has been separated out into two tracks as well as a newly oceanic orchestra, it completely suppers the sense of the original, which evoked a soul crying from the bottom of a well.

As for the tracking highlights, there are several of those revealing instants where, suddenly, key footnotes in pop history are forged — like the moment when it's suggested that the piano motif in "God Only Knows" should be played staccato. This studio-verné footage gives a valuable insight into Brian Wilson as a meticulous, level-headed craftsman rather than the wayward kook of legend (though comparable out-takes from the subsequent, doomed *Smile* would probably tell a different story). The only priming of the strangeness that would come later is an exchange where he suggests bringing a horse into the studio, and someone, even more strangely, suggests that a picture of a horse would do just as well.

The real title of this record could have been *Brian Wilson Directs*, because its peculiar effect is to establish Wilson as the auteur of The Beach Boys, and the rest of the group as the actors who only come on set when all the scenery has been built. But their harmony tracks belay the myth that they were clueless drones who grudgingly followed Brian's lead — detached from the backing, the voices reveal not just their complexity but also the nature of their relationships to gospel, jazz and the quasi-barbershop sound of the group's role models The Four Freshmen.

Incidental revelations among the out-takes include a prototype "Good Vibrations" that's pure Motown pastiche, and some bizarre preparatory scribbles for "Sloop John B" in which the studio guitarists appear to have slipped into souliness. One scandalous omission, at least in the pre-release booklet notes I've got — nothing about the muscians themselves, and their relation to the *Smile* session pack that so inspired Brian.

Every new listen to *Pet Sounds* reminds you of one of pop's bitterest ironies — Brian Wilson conceived this music in response to The Beatles' *Rubber Soul*, and they riposted with *Sergeant Pepper*. That record's doubtful legacy remains largely unquestioned, while *Pet Sounds* still has to struggle for recognition, just as it did in 1966, swamped by the righteous intolerance of America's nascent head culture. "Greatness" is a term too liberally used in pop circles, but this package provides a critical breakdown of how great pop gets assembled. Is it too much to hope for a companion volume of the *Smile* sessions before the millennium is out?

JONATHAN BOPNEY

Unless you're one of those odd people who actually enjoys playing cards, the spoken text is arcane in a mundane kind of way, while the music is mundane in an arcane kind of way. The sun is badly affecting, even as we acknowledge the egerman of the aching euphoria. In that sense, Brian's work resembles the three-card trick, we know we're manipulated, but we can't help falling for it. As *Musica* says in contemplation of the tracks he's been discussing: "It's amazing!"

NICK SPINNEY

## Company Flow

Fumeshater Plus

OFFICIAL BEAVERS BROS. 1134 COMPLOS

An album with a lyric like "Spilled milk spoils/While Ted Turner and Bill Gates rub each other often with olive oil" obviously has a leg up on the competition. A compilation of singles recorded between 94 and 97 for Company Flow's own label, Official, this album is an angry telegram from a new community of independent HipHop. Woods like Company Flow, Anselmi, MF Doom and Juggaknots are growing up in New York around the haggard, redwoods of Laffey Conliffe's shabby private, watered by late night radio shows like Scratch Armstrong's and HipHop-only record stores.

The inverted, reference-nappy Company Flow style lands between Dr. Octagon and Wu-Tang Clan, with Big Jus taking the Rawkston position of furious naturalism and producer D-B going for the cool Keith barn scratches. The production favours beats that do anything but soothe, and Lee Perry-ish drop-ins startle pop's slow-mo dialogue people picking up their cars in parking garages. Calling themselves "The Number One feel-bad crew of the season", Company Flow spit reverberate rhymes that make gun talk seem like last year's goateed-down bomber.

Big Jus and D-B are big on fracturing corporations, local practices like *fuck* as they ride-label probe "Independent as *fuck*" as they say more than once). D-B's off-centre beats are staggeringly good, a showy reminder that HipHop used to make pride in finding the outlands of sound before everyone else.

An overmodulated keyboard and wayward drumline make "Population Control" both wicked and bulletproof, while "The Fire in Your Burn" has the beat of the year, a Soviet drum machine with a wooden leg stumbling after a blind star player.

Paravailing the 1980s splintering of rock into comfortably marginal nodes and aggressively ascendant major labels, *Fumeshater Plus* signals (hopefully) both new hungry talent and a new relation to the means of production. Wu-Tang and Dr. Octagon started indie but didn't stay there, if equally talented artists like Company Flow withdraw their prophecies from Babylon once and for all (and build their own sales), HipHop may be able to stick back to the from a world that sees it as nothing more than beat structure and mythology.

SASHA PRIOR-JONES



## Eric Dolphy

Iron Man  
CMBLY CD 147 CD

## Eric Dolphy

Copercorations  
CMBLY CD 187 CD

Recorded in July 1963 Iron Man finds Eric Dolphy in transition casting off bebop heritage for more sophisticated harmonic and rhythmic structures. While his improvised solos on alto sax, bass clarinet and flute became increasingly abstract, there was always a place for thematic material in his work, a complex vision that would reach a peak of excellence on his later masterpiece *Out To Lunch* (1964) and the almost as good *Just Dancin'* (1964) with precocious Dutch youngsters Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg. Iron Man though is a scolding work in its own right, opening with a bemoaning alto solo on the title track (Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday" receives a sensitive, low-key treatment from his mellow bass clarinet and Richard Davis's reflective alto bass, and an ambitious nine piece group sets off stabling polyrhythms and dense dissonances on "Mahabake".

Conversations (also known as *Music Modulator*) is taken from the same July 1963 sessions as Iron Man though overall it is a less experimental collection with no Dolphy originals among its four tracks. *Fats Waller's* "Jambalaya" features Dolphy's elegant and shimmering elegance by Dolphy's flute and Bobby Hutchinson's splayed winds, their soaring and swooping in the main theme, with trumpeter Woody Shaw unleashes Zappa-esque razzmatazz. An undoubted virtuoso of the alto sax the short solo "Love Me" is a fine example, it's Dolphy's starting reversion of the bass clarinet (presaging the innovative work of Peter Brottmann, Wolfgang Schuys and Hans Koenig that really makes the scale single. On "Alone Together" another marvellous duet between bass clarinet and Richard Davis's double bass. Dolphy coaxes such melancholy beauty from this somewhat mushy bore of an instrument. Opportunities for this seminal free jazz icon to record his own groups were not plentiful, making these albums indispensable documents.

CRIS KRAICHOFF

## Dumny Run

Popcorn  
HOP 148147 502 US CD 1 CD

Here's to shorter records and shorter songs! And a short review: Dumny Run seem to be generically or logically linked to Stockhausen & Walker. They certainly favour the same MO of disordered manipulation of sound with a sense of humor. This attainment yields a pretty great result: very short pairings of the current electronic boutique favours. *Aufrecht*-style jarring and chattering? 1 411 Jungles stumblings? 2 321 Scary Hip-hop openings? 1 231 Detouring

media table? 1 531 Now you've got time to go listen to those long and important albums.

And it's good, so, comes play-again-right-now good, done with all the attention and spent you want someone to maintain while sitting in front of a screen. So here's to miniatures, eludes whatever they are, an understated aesthetic bag more often than not holding just enough in fact. Many of these ideas seem best suited to his obsessive treatment. Which makes me look at some (just some) of the self-important, street-cred, art-cred music out at CDs in the CD era. Think of all the time we've wasted.

SASHA PRIDE-JONES

## Euphone

Euphone  
TAN SUPERHERO 1 480 CD

Multi-instrumentalist Ryan Rappos uses the kind of textures found in the music of fellow Chicagoans Tortoise as a launchpad for his own experiments. Euphone, however, turn out to be far less experimental than the unpredictable Tortoise. It's all pleasing enough, but it doesn't spring any surprises. Indeed, Euphone starts as it means to go on by locking into a subdued, jazzy groove on "Mind Feels Low To Go". The more beat driven, *Ted Blue*, "Yellow" is an improvement, combining an electronic music now with manual synths. A couple of "Designs" tracks by Casey Ray "Two Basic Colours" and "Koko" add a much needed edge. "Two Basic Colours" throws in a contrarily gentle guitar melody against distorted, pulsating, echoed beats. As the guitar plays its restorative pattern the beats don't further and likely on impact. "Koko" is submerged in a dub mix of deep bass and melodic organ. Unfortunately, these render Euphone's more conventional material even weaker by comparison. But there's a shift in tone for the album's final third, signalled by the looped folk guitar melody of "Weatherbeaten" picked against a background of percussive electronic clicks. Acoustic guitar remains prominent for the very last of "My Boatshop" similar to *The Sea And Cake* — and closes the album with the sparkling "Closeup". Euphone manages to feel between two styles, not only are they also diverse to a group identity, they're also smoothed out their edges to the point where they have become almost too easy listening.

TOM RICE

## John Fahey

Wombles  
WOMBLES OF THE ELEMENTS CD 17 CD

## John Fahey/Cul De Sac

The Epiphany Of Glenn Jones  
THE EP 148 57027 CD

Wombles is a fascinating album. It shows John Fahey walking further away from his blues-based picking style, yet still

occasionally looking back over his shoulder. Fahey certainly doesn't want to retreat old ground here. More so than his abrasive comeback album of last year, *City Of Refuge*, Wombles ironically taps right back into Fahey's long standing definition of himself as an 'American Primitive'.

'Primal' may be a better adjective than 'primitive' in describing Fahey's sparse, rough-hewn, gestural improvisations. Given his love of idiosyncratic, improvisational blues performers like Bukka White and Charlie Patton, his new direction is entirely appropriate. Wombles is more purely guitar-based than *City Of Refuge* but it's full of awkward angles, buzzing strings, and leonic poses with strange trapes of effects and ambience.

"Parasol" features samples, presumably of Javanese gamelan over which Fahey improvises. A similar track, "Gamelan Collage" — complete with bird call tapes — is the most obvious link to his collaboration with Cul De Sac. The Epiphany Of Glenn Jones, named after their guitarist, strangely enough, this collaboration features Fahey on more familiar territory, including a stunning, virtually solo reading of Robert Johnson's "Come On In My Kitchen".

These two uncompromising improvising units strike some formidable sparks, no doubt due to the extreme tension there was between them. Fahey recorded nearly all Cul De Sac's material. And calling them "a retro duo act" didn't exactly get things off to a flying start. Cul De Sac largely fulfil the role of backing group, but they sound conversing in this context, exploring a more diverse, less formulaic style than usual. Clattering percussive fuzz bass and Glenn Jones's guitar set out the structure on "The New Red Pony" — when Fahey takes up the lines, the result is delightfully grating.

But the opaque soundscape of "Our Puppets Selves" is anything else all the elements hanging in uneasy space. On the exquisitely dark "Magic Mountain" Fahey plays quietly on one hand even contemplated before, while the group action permits a backdrop. So far, so brilliantly eclectic — until the closing 20 minutes of Fahey's spoken word pieces, "Hate Nothing" and "Nothing", which are merely self-indulgent if they whet your appetite for that rejected material.

MIKE BARNES

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Historic label, hangs together as a cohesive whole. The momentum generated by the rhythm section might owe a lot to Can, not least in its supple monotony, but Jessemme have clearly marked their own dynamic territory. On much of this music they explore a conflict between dislocation and resolution, restless, jittery Electronics and distorted keyboards contrasting with fluid, sustained rhythms — "In Stroud" Take So Long For A Plan To Double (they favour word songsters) sounds both oddly familiar and laconic. Emulating a range of vintage Hoags, Farfars and other keyboards, Jessemme reject their tone imitations and integrate them into powerful, driving arrangements. These tracks reaffirm the idea of the group as an experimental, collaborative unit, producing a freefloating, directional body of music.

Lobradford have never been ones to court the obvious, but their fourth album is more direct and streamlined than their last release, *Lobradford II*. *Medio Nonyo* is more overtly linear and takes Lobradford further into soundtrack territory, beginning with an explicit homage to Ennio Morricone in the aptly titled "Seguete" — here there are no obscuring layers of sonic detritus, but a direct guitar melody with muted keyboards, shifting towards an orchestra of strings. It's a far more open, even dramatic, sound. Escaping the occasional muffled, treated voice samples, this is instrumental music, carefully structured and beautifully executed. Like it never becomes a pall, Ambient wash & maintains a tectonic integrity through all its shifts in mood, from the elegance of "Wry" to the plaintive, "Grate." Only the brooding "Victor" really evokes the earlier Lobradford style, with what's comparatively "full" vocal performance (a murmur at best) and menacing rhythmic undertow which eventually gives way to a swell of strings.

Without losing their uniqueness, Lobradford have moved out of the darkness unblinkingly into the light.

**TOP REBDE**

## Steve Lacy

*Five Factions*  
RPM CD 85 CD

## Ivo Perelman & Borah Bergman

*Geometry*  
4EO CD 18 249 CD

## Ivo Perelman & Joe Morris

*Strings*  
4EO CD 18 249 CD

The yin and yang of the Improv duo gets a thorough hanging down on these records, with old hand Lacy meaning up to five different piano players, while young braver Perelman takes on a couple of combats for comically different results. Still a comparative rarity in orthodox jazz terms, the duo is a centerpiece in free playing and it's

a tough one to sustain over what used to be called a double album's length. Suspicious of how free speech can be compromised into mere conversation, I would score these as two good hits, one hopeless miss.

Lacy's steady, steady music resists confrontation: he means to go his sweet way on matters of tempo (slow), phrasing (keyboard) and attack (piano), and the piano keyboard tends to act as a kind of combuster, surrounding that fiery, coaxing style. Herlin Osoff does very well with the Morricone anguishes of "The Crust" but she's not so attuned to "Blues For Aldo" — as to often with her music, she makes clearly for deadpan. Three (genre) Monk duets with Meira Meneghini are characteristically amusing, but I preferred both the masochist Improv "Twenty One" with Fred Van Hove, and the quite gorgeous "Art", where that underused mazzur Uchi Gumpert invigilates Lacy into his warmed lyrics.

Perelman has come from nowhere to suddenly be hugely recorded. I count at least six own-name albums in the last 12 months, with supposedly more to come. The Leo label sets him up in two contrasting positions. With another, tacit, enigmatic Bergman, he plays tenor, his real instrument, and if you haven't heard his window rattling roar before, this is perhaps the best place to start. Some mention Albert Ayler, but Perelman's obvious favourite is Gato Barbieri — the last machismo and bedeviled virtuoso in El Gato vibron as freedom fighter. Bergman, a wily partner, alternately builds him up and undoes him with a whole bagful of keyboard mannerisms. This is an hour of very hard playing, sometimes unintentionally funny, and the sonorous sax onirality makes me think that Perelman must be good to hear live.

His meeting with Morris is another story. Ivo goes back to his apprentice instrument, the cello, and the spidery fretboard chases which ensue with guitarist Joe are — well, the word "idiotic" comes to mind. When Perelman decides to sing instead of play, in a near-constant howl, it's just plain awful.

**RICHARD COOK**

## Rune Lindblad

*Deaths Of The Moon*  
RPM CD 97101 CD

## Folke Rabe

*What??*  
DEBRES CD 88 0612 CD

Two slices of electronic music from Sweden's academic archive. Rune Lindblad, who died six years ago, was born in Gothenburg in 1923. He began making tapes in 1953 at a time when electronic music was split into two camps. The Germans wanted to create an absolute music from sine waves. Serial techniques were to control parameters at micro levels. Stockholm talked about being able to build a symphony into a single note. In contrast, the French, led by Pierre Schaeffer at RadioFusion Française, spliced and mixed

ready-recorded sound, *musique concrete*.

In a decision that led to him not being taken seriously as an ideologue by the post-war avant garde, Lindblad used elements of both. His pragmatic approach is all the more striking now that lo-fi has brought his favoured sonics — interference, distortion, erasure — into the realm of DIY rock. In 1957, though, a public performance resulted in the audience demanding its money back. Newspaper critics called the evening "tune torture". As ever, an indication of musical life.

*Deaths Of The Moon* contains eight tape pieces made between 1953 and 1960. "Party" is random interference, radio wave fluff, delicate and unstructured. The title track uses dislocate (trophon) sounds. "Fragment O" has ethnic pose sounds, a primitivist denial of the tempered scale: a gamelan lost in the dusk, a workshop rustling into atrophy. The sense of loss and decay evoked by real space-echo contrasts with the bright pips and pops favoured by the absolutists at the Cologne and Columbia-Princeton studios. "Fragment 1" borrows the Orientalism of Cage's prepared piano: an uninforming minimalism, a rapacious brokenness. "Fragment 2" is all blurring thuds, never-ending bangs, the sound of a narrow gauge railway transposing sleep in a suburban tunnel. "Evensing" comes as a shock because it introduces notes, guitar twangs, insistent chitterings, hints of impossible linear air. The stops and starts recall the rhythms of manual labour. "Optica 1" finishes by live-wiring your nerve ends into a Tesla-Franzhausen organo accumulation registered in flashes of blinding blue. Conical drill sounds morph into cloud layer weffiness. All in all, quite a trip.

Folke Rabe's *What??* was made in 1967 at the electronic studios of the Swedish Radio. It consists of a single, harmonically complex tone that reaches a climax over the course of 25 minutes. A second version, at half speed, lasts twice as long. To these ears it sounds like an academic exercise, but those enamoured of Brian Eno's wallpaper minimalism may care to investigate.

**BEN WATSON**

## Alvin Lucier

*Paranormalis*  
LOVELY MUSIC CD 1012 CD

People who don't like Alvin Lucier's brand of electroacoustic music often make the point that, in over 30 years of writing, the American composer has not much changed. They do have a point, although essentially it's not much of a criticism. Lucier has had one phenomenally interesting idea to explore, through music, the organisation of sound, to discover its harmonics and, in the process, rediscover something of the mysterious and ineffable beauty of the way sounds linger in the imagination. Even Lucier's wisest emulators (like, for instance, neo-composers where trademarks or disturbances in the

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## soundcheck

earth's microphone were hooked up to sonic outputs) have had something of this quality about them. His results have none of the creepy, laboratory-created processes that marked the efforts of many of his generation. It's apt that much of Lucier's work has been released by NYC's Lovely Music, and this latest record of four pieces dating from the early 1990s continues the association.

**Wind Shadows**, the opening piece, is Lucier's clearest statement of the work as an idea in progress. Ideationally linked to *Spinning*, an earlier piece which involved two sine wave generators, it was written for pianist Roland Dahinden (who, with pianist Hildegard Kleebe, is one of the two principals of this disc), and it involves pure wave oscillators, tuned a tenth of a cycle apart, and trombone. Dahinden plays long, muted tones and then there's a kind of silence, each section lasts about ten seconds. Then the shadows themselves come into play, as a sound, which can only be described as softly beaten air, begins to appear. It's the rhythm of no rhythm, which Steve Reich also explored on his early works, and again, once heard, it's mesmerizing. Both musicians use the subsequent pieces — music for piano with snare drum and "amplified sonorous vessels" and *Panorama itself* — to explore Lucier's visions of a harmonic architecture. This is delicate, spatial work at its very best.

LOUISE GRAY

### Merzbow

Overboard

VINYL COMMUNICATIONS VC101 CD

### Merzbow

Hybrid Nostalgia

VINYL COMMUNICATIONS VC113 CD

### Various Artists

America Subtles Merzbow

VINYL COMMUNICATIONS VC131 CD

### Merzbow/Ladybird

Balmace

HUMAN WIRECORDS HW013 CD

It's no easy task to unleash noise in quite the gentlemanly style of Masam Akiha's Merzbow — drawing equally on Prog rock freak out, abrasive free jazz explosion and psychedelic Hendrix sound. In fact it's become an easier task to unleash the Merzbow "phenomenon." Quite apart from the awaited 50 CD box set retrospective from the Extreme label, a cluster of smaller nosacore concerns such as California's Vinyl Communications are dipping into the liberal flow coming out of Merzbow's 25th studio to set the name of the noise god among their own rosters.

As might be expected, VCG's compilation tribute about America Subtles Merzbow, is more a testament to the cottage industry in Merzbow fan culture — a loose association of Metal, grunge and art school experiment —

### The Fall

Levitate

MIMPUL 9 JCD

To skim across the surface for a moment of this latest riveting, quixotic chapter in the dog-eared Chronicles of the House of Blahnd Smith, *Levitate* contains at least one solid gold entry in The Fall's Greatest Song Titles of All-Time list. Wait for a reading on the content, because in this most pointed of music charts, "the quartet of doc SHANLEY" (as it is printed on the sleeve) is right up there with "Dirty Meat," "Barkers In Phoenix," "Mollusc In Tyrol," "The Aphid," "The League Of Bald-headed Men," "Lucifer Over Lancashire," "British People In Hot Weather" and "Gut Of The Quantifier."

As Mark Sinker suggested in his review of last year's *The Light User Syndrome* in *The Wire* 150, it takes time for Fall songs to reveal themselves to the object. Listening recently to the relatively plain-speaking, 20 years old "Bingo-masters Breakout," the full hilarious report of one particular coxswain leaped out and hit me for the first time. The keywords in "the quartet of doc SHANLEY" appear to be "prissy" and "reepie," but as these are traded back and forth between three overapping narrators who are in turn largely buried by a heaving juggernaut of a soundtrack, who knows what else will emerge from the mix over the next two decades?

Mark E Smith has always kept The Fall's complexity (and wit) covert, shielding it behind a pock-marked mask of Lancashire pragmatism and a seemingly shambling approach to presentation. This latter "obfuscating" character has often been interpreted as amateurish ineptitude, as if The Fall was a half-hearted project, a casual undertaking to be judged alongside the part-time, idiot-brained antics of Fall playagnists from The Nightingales to Pavement.

In fact, to get clinical for a moment, the sound of The Fall could be defined as both an extension of Smith's anti-bourgeois maverick politics, and a desire to bring this in this world noises which have been revealed to him down the years in shattering awake dreams and via unknowable psychic conduits.

More so than any other group, The Fall occupy the recording space in order to manifest visions of existential revelation. As a result, Smith's abilities as an arranger of wayward sonic materials have usually been overlooked in favour of close analyses of his refracted lyric-texts (see Michael Bracewell's *England Is Mine*). In Fall songs, and that includes the 19 which are included on the two CDs of *Levitate*, all instruments sound (delivered to hermetic scales and modes. Driven by the urge to distort, the songs' rudimentary frameworks are rethought and reborn by the use of unusual rhythmic accents, the scroline placement of the instruments in the mix, the instinctive accumulation of multiple layers of sonic debris, extraneous noise bursts, and the constant manipulation of all sound levels. Texts become metaphors, fragmenting as they go, folding in on themselves, sinking deeper into the recesses carved by the group's trawl through a uniquely organic soundtrack.

than the ruin of a more deeply assimilated morality: for God to bleed how can you cover "Merzbow anyone?" Blackmore's "Electro Nuts" samples vocals repeating "like joining to Merzbow," and Chemical Y like collage

anecdotal fragments about how they turned up \$50 of twentys playing Merzbow to a girlfriend. Others, like Lester and Chaz Ship, manage to bring the right kind of rambling and scolding stories — clouds of noise

punctuated by a drummer's sense of burst and interruption. However, possibly because they don't possess the full baggage of Akka's equipment, they come out sounding too and lump. Greater have to be applauded for



Mark E. Smith

On *Levitate*, Smith and this latest version of The Fall continue to capsize traditional rock 'n' roll dynamics and songforms, partly by tapping into the motokin (impulse which connects The Johnny Burnette Trio's "Train Kept A-Rollin'" with Neil's "Hallelujah"), a link made explicit by what on first hearing appears to be a filler, a throwaway version of Hank Mobley's "Jungle Rock." Accepting the fact that it is a cover version, this could almost be the defining Fall track: a mercurial motokin pulse, the clash of overdriven frequencies, instruments dropped in and out of the mix in accordance with an oblique, intuitive logic, an out-of-tempo guitar part set to one side of the soundfield that nags at the brain until it becomes the song's focus pull. Smith's vocal line delivered as a dirty smear across the surface of the music.

Compared to *The Light User Syndrome*, which turned out to be The Fall's most concentrated and centred work since 1982's *Hex Enduction Hour*, *Levitate* at first feels too diffuse (like all Fall records, in fact). The ferocious sonic and textural voracities described by "humane EDWARD," "4 1/2 inch" and "of gang" seem to overshadow the opening breakfast-driven montage "ten houses of EVE," the hurling "everybody but myself" (and its brilliant audio vent tape intro), and an elegiac piano miniature, "lap kid" (which later turns up as the music track to "I come and stand at your door," credited to keyboard player Julia Nagle and "I can't"). But over numerous hearings the tracks coalesce, their angular trajectories held in twisting tension by the idiosyncratic studio madman, and of course, ME Smith's slurring delivery of texts which continue to map and illuminate our collective topographies and interiors like no other.

"I wish there was someone out there who wasn't afraid of me" he sings in a searing version of "I'm A Mummy" (writing credit: "unknown"). No chance: The Fall's intelligence addresses, scours and liberates us all.

TONY HERRINGTON

managing to get the Merzbow sound on what sounds like a synthesizer. But the most interesting tracks here are those making links between Merzbow and jazz. Speculum Fights free sax and strings produce a storm of grating and squealing, while UCLA Experimental Workshop give an intriguing Merzbow impression with piano guitar and waves — superimposing a free jazz tangle over a clashing cabinet sound, the piano creating a low end rumble.

But such ad-hoc homages wit in the face of Merzbow's own Dented, also on VC, where the isatane is gripped and rarely released by a manic brusque otherworld that conjures up Tsukamoto's Totem films: the human pleasure principle in the throes of a technological death drive "coverable" music: stimulation by noise feeding back to its utmost through riddling equipment. The second track here starts where its probably ends with the grinding of train brakes, electric storms and an apocalypse of iron and metal. The four tracks, three of which approach 20 minutes, pile on different feedback drones that rumble and throb out of phase, building a highly charged surface that Merzbow drives to repeatedly new thresholds — the tension collapses only to re-form with new intensity.

The pieces here were recorded between 1995-96 with tapes, EMS synths and "metallic" electronics, but mix in material from as far back as 1993: the sheer elemental gusto often giving way to more controlled

dialogues — moments where Merzbow enters into a sort drum battle and noises are punctuated with sudden cut-outs and answering blazes drawing on scratch syncretisms.

In his journey from 1980 cut-ups, it's possible to see Merzbow expressing a more-is-more equipment power trip, harking back to the 70s — his long-haired figure gazing over mysteriously lit banks of equipment on Hybrid Noisebloom is reminiscent of images of Klaus Schulze. Recorded this year, Hybrid has a more sleek, even spacier feel than Dented, a noticeable change being his use of so-f-h showers of Moog and Theremin over the grinding high frequencies. Abrupt elemental noise slips into the mould of a techno fantasia, the sound of a space station set to convulse with endless wobbling glides and rising drones and sirens reaching emergency levels.

But the prize here has to go to Balance credited as a Merzbow/duffed collaboration. In fact the CD contains two albums separated so that each comes out of one speaker at the same time. Merzbow's 38-minute "Floating Eloy" track, a mid-tone frenetic scramble of wailing, flickering noise starts off on the left while after a minute a wail, Ladybird, aka Tanja Kopecky and The Jet Lady Bawling Girls kick in on the right with a drawling bludge Electro-pop Tracks such as "I Feel Summer" and "Tonight I'm Your Automatic Latin Lover" fade from

"Cryer" and "I Feel Love", while the melodies are sung in a seductive, pliant-but-lazy Teutonic tone evoking both plastic cool and the melodic warmth of the B-52s. You can choose to hear the albums separately by adjusting the balance from speaker to speaker, but heard together they produce a delicious conjunction of pop and noise. If Merzbow is in danger of being glamourised for a nose-fetish audience, for whom size is everything, the record reminds you that by stepping out of the ghetto and coming into being with music, noise can gain more surprising and subversive powers.

**MATT RYTON**

## Nils Petter Molvær

Klimmer

ECM 1550 CD

What's all the then an ECM album whose sleeve credits "samples from the album Aasm Ambros' Last in The Transition ? Has someone finally had a word in Manfred Eicher's ear about the 90s musical mood?

For the last five years or so, while Eicher's attention has been turned on ECM's increasingly quixotic New Series subversion, the label's jazz wing has remained flightless. Rejecting the legacy of such mid-meat astrajazz masterpieces as Jan Garbarek's Sort, Julian Priester's Love Love and Polarization, Berne Maspin's Jewel In The Lotus, and al-

the others, many of us are still gazing to hear on CD after nearly 30 years, most of the improvisation output has contained all the nourishment value of a beaker of vegetable juice.

So this CD, with its sampled Big Beats and accompanying 12' of blundered remixes, will probably be greeted with as much cynicism as enthusiasm. Yet Nils Petter Molvær has evidently been hiding his light under a bushel in his jazz group Musqulano. On *Klimmer* the trumpeter also plays guitar, bass, percussion and samples, and most of the eight tracks (with the exception of the belated "Plumic Years") are constructed around some moderately pointy drum loop. But he can muster a beautiful, breathy, vibro-true horn technique when he wants to — as well as the occasional angry distorted scaggle — and while the misadventures of his group members (Lars Fredt's kindred guitar, J. Rune Arnesen's drums) and Ulf Wad Holand (samples) don't approach the intricate layers of a John Hassell, they audibly restrain themselves from outright soloistic impute as they work in and around the groove. Indeed the closing three track sequence constitutes the finest 12 minutes ECM has released in a very long time. Arnesen's guitar garroting the melody of "Song Of Sand II" over a John Bonham-style groove.

If Eicher really means business, he should try making some more bold gestures like a bunch of young producers make the guts out of his

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# Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan/Michael Brook

Star Rise

REAL WORLD (GEMMA CD)

There was something extraordinary in the dynamics of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan that always made me wonder whether his pop records weren't somehow missing the point. On stage, and on the records he made with his accompanying Party, the shape of his Qawwali music was properly religious, which is to say, only one step from sexual rapture. I've rarely witnessed such exhausting performances — exhausting because Nusrat worked on the principle of the long, slow build up, gradually climbing to explosive release — and then cutting off, starting the next song again from the bottom, obliging the listener to constantly readjust to these repeated, violently disrupted staircase dynamics.

That's why Nusrat's records with producer and guitarist Michael Brook seemed to go too far in toning his sound, which was not just an affair of the singing voice, but very much a layered, looped babbling discourse on ecstasy. The voice had to follow its own course, rather than being brought in and out, and demoted by the straggle-headedness of dance pop structures. You can see why Brook might have wanted to pare down what he called the "Heavy Metal solos" of Nusrat's singing, but you can't help feeling that the result was perilously close to coffee table music.

Partly as a result of these records, Nusrat became known as a provider of individual dynamics, a sort of novelty instrument to be used in the same way that U2 used Pavarotti. It led to unlikely homage by the likes of Eddie Vedder on the *Dead Man Walking* soundtrack, and even stranger use as all-purpose "manic" music in the babelogue of pop racket that

made up Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* soundtrack. There shouldn't really be any problem with film music being detached from its original meaning, but this is an odd case — Sufi devotional songs being co-opted by thrill-kill quick-fix cinema? What exactly did Stone and his music co-ordinator Trent Reznor think they were listening to?

Star Rise is a peculiar footnote to Nusrat's career: not a straight remix album but something of a polemical exercise, and both a tribute and an attempt to measure the Asanness of Nusrat's music against the new Asian identities being written on the current UK club scene. Here are tracks from the Nusrat/Brook collaborations *Must Must* and *Night Song* remixed by British Asian dance acolytes. It's as involving and as revealing as such remix projects ever are — which is to say there are only a few tracks which open up the originals in radically revealing ways, but conversely few remixers hubristic enough to try and unsettle Nusrat from his own music (in the way that, say, several pushy types attempted to shove Can into a corner on the patchy *Sacrifice* project).

The more heads-down essays here (by Joi and Aki Nawaz) don't do anyone a service, and the real rationale of the record comes from the people who've teased out and squeezed down key elements of the original. The mixers who put most space into their versions are Talvin Singh and State Of Bengal. Singh takes "My Heart, My Life", teases the remaining traces of its kora part into suggestive niggles, and takes his

Nusrat and Party



complex percussion parts at a leisurely lope, and State do the single most audacious thing with Nusrat's voice, stretching one note out into an impossibly extended line. The other standout track is from The Dhol Foundation and Fun-Da-Mental, who close off by wrapping the voice round some thunderous looped drumming.

There's a respectful residue of Nusrat here to make this seem like a tribute record rather than an appropriation (conversely, most of the artists make short shrift of Brook's own studio embellishments). I'd still rather get lost in the rougher, more passionate terrain of Nusrat's original Party music, but *Star Rise* is pretty enjoyable. Take it as a manifesto record from a generation of rising stars who know how to pay respect, but all importantly, not too much respect.

JONATHAN BOPPMEY

back catalogue, for starters or commission an album by Phoenix City Pleinville, the label should be prepared to receive feedback from long-term devotees for the release, not to mention its accompanying "12", but hopefully it will persevere regardless.

BOB YOUNG

## Morphogenesis

Formative Causation

MYCOPHILE SPOKES CD

## Adam Bohman

Last Orders

MYCOPHILE SPOKES CD

Morphogenesis is an outfit which unites numerous eclectic, tried-and-tested and homemade sound sources to make as little noise as possible in the pursuit of anti-Ambient soundscapes. Michael Prime may be the best-known member, credited here

with water machine, radio strings, electronics and sound projection. I liked his use of radio, an element which is particularly hard to integrate into an improvisatory musical venture, marring otherwise splendid recordings by other travellers in similar terrain. It's worth noting the other contributors, as this was the clearest indication of the musical content. These are Adam Bohman (prepared violin, balalaika objects), Ron Briefel (electronics, sound projection), Owe Hall (piano, percussion), Fred Samsen (prepared guitar, electronics), Roger Suderland (piano, percussion, strings) — yes, strings, not strings. Recorded in 1986 but previously unreleased, this is an engaging and regularly diverse collection, evidently the product of a concerted, inspired, resourceful and empathetic group.

On *Last Orders*, Bohman credits himself with "prepared violin, wire glasses, balalaika, homemade string instruments, muted trumpet, wire brush on tiles, springs, toy

telephone tapes (bells, trumpet arrivals etc.) One Jonathan Bohman contributes "objects" to one piece and "production, wire glasses and text" on another. Again, it's an undeniably interesting exercise in electronic concrete, and not the sort of venture to fare well in a primarily Ambient role. Though Bohman creates a relatively complex field of sound, he nevertheless fails to demand attention. Mostly recorded between 1995 and 1997, presumably in the studio, there's one stray live track from a 1989 festival date. "Days Of Sand And Shovels" starts prominently in a comparatively agitated mood, and suggests further possibilities (Nusrat City's *Abstruse* and Caspar Brötzmann and FM Einheit's *Merry Christmas* both come to mind), although it soon reverts to tone. Perhaps most damagingly, the cover sports the most unflattering portrait I've ever seen, as a '70s acid wash paints Bohman's bald pate a fetching shade of bile.

TIM OWEN

## Pauline Oliveros

Electronic Worlds

PARADIGM P004 CD

## Pauline Oliveros

Allen Bog/Beautiful Soup

P0055/P21012 CD

"There was only one place I was interested in going with what I needed to express and that was made" said Pauline Oliveros in *The Wire* '164. Though these two valuable LPs, *Electronic Worlds* predates the 1969 period the statement refers to, they mark the near beginnings of the fantastic voyage through body and soul that her life's work has been dedicated to chasing.

The technology Oliveros was employing back in 1965-67, when the music contained here was recorded, might not have permitted the same precise calibrations of punie and emotion as later digital equipment. But then again the unavoidable chance elements —

most of them related to the erratic quality of reel-to-reel tapes... built into her pioneering tape delay set-ups, variously tied with combination tones from up to 12 generators, oscillators and/or record turntables, were in themselves only more than hush, such uncontrollable variables notwithstanding represent the human fallibility.

Because the works were mostly recorded real-time in the studio, you can sense the composer responding to these variables, tuning herself into each new configuration of sounds as the linked record-and-playback system of tapes turns through cycle after cycle and adjusting the input accordingly. And given Oliveira's desire to express what was inside, her tape delay system can be seen as analogous to, if not a direct extension of her nervous system. The intimacy of her electronic compositions suggests parallels with John Cage's statements about silence as the joining of the blood and the nervous system. Just as Cage's remarks were predicated on close listening to the body's internal music, Oliveira would integrate Deep Listening practices into the compositional and improvisational musics through which she explores her interior landscapes.

Listen deep to her electronics compositions and you feel a warmth that was either beyond the understanding, or simply didn't figure in the thinking of the more familiar and infinitely more formal works of officially recognized composers like, say, Stockhausen. That is not to say these discs are the sonic equivalent of womb immersion, full of comforting bops, dips and whooshes. On the contrary, as Oliveira's prime concern is researching human perception, her pieces out of necessity require close attention. If her discoveries can be downright spooky—the echo and distortion of the voices on *Beautiful Noise*, for example, is like an insidious feedback to a bad acid trip where reality refuses to stay in focus, they are also illuminating. Unlike future researchers from Industrial through Dark Ambient, who went real big on alienation, Oliveira's *U-Electronics* opened a way into the interior, offering a journey through a body that brought you closer to yourself. It's awesome to speculate how the course and temperament of electronic music might have changed had more people been listening to her back to the beginning.

**NRJ 100P**

**Evan Parker & Lawrence Casserley**  
*Solar Wind*  
NOJN 7035 CD

**Evan Parker & Ned Rotherberg**  
*Montejoy Pizzello*  
LED CDJ247 CD

What a year for Evan Parker released! There has been a lingering suspicion in certain circles

that Parker's genius is of the strictly personal variety, a tendency to write him off as a niche artist. In 1997 Parker has blown this idea out of the water. The ECM release, *Toward The Margins*, by his Electro Acoustic Ensemble, for example, is a milestone. *Solar Wind* is a more ramified exploration of the same territory with Parker on soprano sax being partnered by Lawrence Casserley treating his source material with a signal processing instrument. Fittingly for a Touch release, the treatments are the dominant creative principle, but the music still retains echoes and explicit evidence of Parker's stylistic trademarks. It's more austere than the earlier release, and has a more loosely exploratory feel. It also stands in marked contrast to the saxophonist's own *Process And Reality*.

On the face of it, Parker's duet with Ned Rotherberg seems a less exciting prospect. Surely he has explored similar territory in the past, as in the fairly recent duet with Anthony Braxton? Of course, there are similarities, so if you liked that duet you'll like this, too. At the very least, this disc is valuable for considering a trilogy of duets between Parker, Rotherberg and Tuvan vocalist Saakshi Manchajik. Rotherberg is an immensely engaging artist with a forceful approach to the horn every bit the measure of Parker's. Parker restricts himself to soprano and tenor, and Rotherberg to alto and bass clarinet, both instruments on which he excels. The two complement each other well, even skanking each other's expertise roles. Many of the passages of kaleidoscopic circular breathing, for example, are attributable to Rotherberg rather than to Parker. Perhaps neither of these releases is as indispensable as *Toward The Margins* or the Evan Parker Trio recording with Florian Criel, but they are by no means second-best efforts. Rather, they are all the more amazing for the comparative modesty of their conception. Oh, and if you can't fill in more than a handful of the clues in the free crossword printed on the *Montejoy Pizzello* sleeve, you know a damn sight more about Parker's world than I do.

**TWO OWEN**

## William Parker & Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra

*Staccato In The Time World*  
ALPHADILE ALJ202 CD

**David S Ware Quartet**  
*Whodunnit Of Uncertainty*  
AHP RECORDS AHP011 CD

**Dorgon & William Parker**  
"G"  
JUP801 CD

**Christopher Cauley**  
*FINland*  
ECHOE PT005 CD

If you want free jazz to survive in America, William Parker is the name to cite the

troubly of its Permanent Musical Revolution. His presence isn't simply a guarantee of good music; it marks out a commitment that flies in the face of current cultural assumptions. The defiance is exhilarating. Like a rock and pounding surf, his great booming bass reappears again and again on successive releases. Here are four.

*Sunrise In The Tone World* appears on AHP Fidelity, a new label set up by Steve Joerg. Inexplicable for the recent outbreak of musical life on Homestead. A double CD, it congregates 24 musicians to play Parker's charts. The title track shows that Sun Ray's conceit of warped big band grotesque still stalks abroad. A theme that belongs to a 60s TV co-writer bursts into laser-and mob rule. Gregg Bendians rainbow vibes spinnise glitterball at every hearing option. Disc two contains a 40-minute collective improvisation that expands and contracts like a well-defining amoeba, an indecent protoplasm hallucinated by a three dimensional microscope. In the booklet, Parker makes statements in which poetry and politics become undistinguishable. It all adds up to a massive manifesto.

The title of David Ware's *Warden Of Uncertainty* is somewhat misleading. Certainly the tenor saxophonist and his quartet—Matthew Shipp (piano), William Parker (bass), Susie Ibarra (drums)—pitch the music into realms that vibrate with unswerving intensity. But they do so with a punishing trenchancy that is the opposite of hesitation, evasion, polite postmodern irony. Like Coltrane's "Sun Ship" each tune hinges on a primal internal. The musicians unfold a catharsis of emphases, concentrating the ritual aspect of free jazz into an enormous darkness. Ware's dry, humorless intensity will repeat casual listeners, but those who stick with him will be rewarded with a unique immersion of compacted suffering, the heart's blood deep frozen the skin discarded.

Listeners hip to Ayler, Shepp, Brotzmann, Wilkinson and Ware—the heroes of extreme saxophone—will have their ears turned around by Dorgon (Gordon Knauer). As *Marzabou, Ascension and Dumtrece* have demonstrated, it's doubly impressive when something horrible proves its musical necessity. Knauer plays shockingly primitive figures on his out-of-tune C-melody saxophone. Literally, as Ernie Watts and Anthony Braxton have demonstrated, this instrument can be into harmonic distortion. Parker responds with bass riffs of epic monumentality. Recording is so cushioned your speakers show the bass on your gas fire tremble, abrasion and yet more abrasion. No Aylerian folk gospel charm to loosen the teeth joining. Percussionist Herre Gessner has compared Parker's musical power to an ocean liner. On track two Parker kicks the listener into the engine room: repetition needn't necessarily be tedium and misread. Knauer hacks up saxophone

Maurice Ravel



## Maurice Ravel

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clots and frags that blast expectation into smotherers. Am-kinky packaging — consanguine cardboard — reinforces the sense that Knauer is doing something unutterably deliberate, brutal and strange. On *Filand*, Christopher Cauley begins with slow strangled notes on alto. Parker blows low sighs. Gregg Bendian scatters cymbal shimmerers and xylophone chimes. Ensemble-jazz organon envelops electric event — the tense pretenses of improvisation is infused with jazz's unproven warmth. On "My Bell" Cauley dips into the arabic of Ornette Coleman's melodies, big burning notes from Parker underline everything in scoping left-up graffiti. Though hardly as heart-stopping as either the slug out with Dorgan or the collective excess of Little Huey Cauley's sophisticated how *Hinguaness* is maybe more suited to domestic consumption. Fresh

BEN WATSON

## Courtney Pine Underground

TALKING (CD) 537 135 (C)

It's ironic that the more Courtney Pine embraces the mainstream the less success he seems to achieve, in commercial terms at least. The singular, Coltrane-inspired tenorist of his debut album, *Journeys To The Edge*, *Wines*, still remains his best sell. Since then he's been a victim of his own versatility, moving from the abstraction of such work as *The Vision's* Tale LP through soul collaborations with Mick Paine and Soul II Soul to the reggae of the *Closest To Home* and Bob Marley tribute LPs. His last album, *Modern Day Jazz Stories*, a Hotbox jazz fusion of tenor blowing and turntables, should have caught the prevailing mood of those nu-beat jazz bars, yet it didn't. Too much jazz, not enough nu-beat. I suspect

*Underground* breaks a similar path though this time with more success. Last time out, it felt as if Pine was trying to prove himself against the rest of his group. Here, he seems more at ease. A lot of this has to do with Reggie Veal and Jeff Wills, both veterans of Branford Marsalis's groups, and hence capable of laying it down pure for the reader's jazz thrice as well as bowing up for his Buckshot Le Fours after ego. They display the same versatility here, listening up *Modern Day Jazz* with deep Hi-Hop beats, providing the barest whisper of a rhythmic background for the fierce abstract improvisation of "Book Of The Devil" (Pine's first piece for a long time), keeping it crisp and dry for the intimate lyricism of the vocal tracks featuring chanteuse Jheba.

Such a firm foundation gives Pine every opportunity to build towering monuments to his talent, but instead he seems content to let his fellow players shine, in particular guitarist Mark Whithell and US keyboard player Cyrus Chestnut. Du Pagan's keyboards benefit by their location deeper within the tune, forming smoky textures than the

abrasive raptures of the previous LP. And Pine hoo? His sax playing is certainly more varied than of yore, moving from a breezy, intimate tone ("In-Sense Song") through the jazz-Hotbox swing favoured by such artists as Grover Washington Jr ("Save The Children"), to the vertical sheets of modal sound reminiscent of Pharoah Sanders or Yusuf Lateef ("Book Of The Devil"). But it's as a bandleader and arranger that he really shines here. Perhaps by pushing himself further back, he'll keep to the front again. That would be ironic justice.

PETER PLIMPTRE

## Pizzicato Five Happy End Of The World

PANADOR D.L.E. 198 (C) LP

Imagine a world where by general consensus the three greatest records ever made are Deee-Lite's "Groove Is In The Heart", Cola Boy's "Seven Ways To Love" and Shonen Knife's cover version of The Carpenters' "Top Of The World" — a world where Sergio Pinedes, Jimmy Webb, Stereolab and The Association rule in amicable coalition, and where anyone trying to buy an Ocean Colour Scene album is sentenced to a ritual beating with a lime-green velvet-and-plastic handbag. Too good to be true, of course, but for the duration of the effervescently transcendental triumph, this sleek, chirpy feat of sound from retro-futurist Japanese duo Pizzicato Five, it seems like that paradise has arrived.

When producer Yasuhiro Kamei recreates the shapes and textures of Euro-American 60s pop at its smoothest and funniest, fashioning elegant and witty collages of harpichords, symphony and Herb Alpert brass, scooping up the lush cheese of advertising jingles and topping off the cocktail with Mike Nomp's bittersweet Scarsie Shaw vocals. A variety of rhythms scendence through different decades — a machine-tooled Motown bounce, some stuttering Hi-Hop, a string-enriched disco glide that Silver Convention might covet, or some drum 'n' bass breakbeats to stir a little urgency into the soufflé.

As for what it might mean on a deep level, no doubt a paranoid thesis could be conjured up which casts Pizzicato Five as Pacific Rim conspirators sifting through the debris of the outsourced cultural economies of the West as the century slouches to conclusion, but then "deeper levels" are anathema to postmodern texts like this. What matters is the gleaming perfection of the surfaces, the raising of theft to an art form, the giddy fun to be had from running amok through the museum of pop history armed with a braising contempt for the stuffiness of tradition and a giant giddy colouring book. On those counts, *Happy End Of The World* is a total triumph, a fustal of candyfloss to ward off the mopeful dullness of certain other versions of the 60s.

ANDY REDWIST

## Patti Smith

Peace And Noise

ARISTA 01822 10360 (C)

With her second album since reemerging recording after an eight-year absence, Patti Smith consolidates her position as the culture's foremost mourner. Though she herself sees *Peace And Noise* as a political record, it is still heavily marked by death: The titles accurately lay her subjects "Warring Underground", "Ritual City", "Death Singing", "Memorial Hour" and "Lost Call". But then again, the work of mourning and act of protest are not necessarily exclusive, and the two activities come together in the figures she mourns most strongly here: Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. Both Ginsberg and Burroughs posted death as the Ugly American experience, and in their absence Patti Smith has elected herself to tackle the subject head on, in songs about AIDS, cut suicide war and more. It's a courageous stance, not so much politically, but culturally and commercially, given how punch-drunk and war weary the rock audience became by the time of American defeat in Vietnam.

That she has overcome potential media hostility is down to how she tones the loss of figures like Ginsberg and Burroughs into timely reminders of the cultural necessity for dissenting voices. As with all Patti Smith's best work, it might just as easily have fallen flat on its face. And for certain this one is not without its shaky moments. If the picture of two gunmen saluting Burroughs's gravestone featured in the booklet is misplaced, frankly — is Smith paying tribute or passing herself off as the keeper of the flame? — "Spill", her tremendous musical setting of the Code to Ginsberg's *Howl*, is a powerful invocation of the dreams and desires for a different America that Ginsberg originally mapped out in his recital of *Beat* heroes. By turns bitter and elegiac, in Smith's rendition it shows the act of grieving also involves anger, and perhaps the urgency of her own politically enraged songs arises out of her feelings of loss and the sense that time is running out.

BRA SODP

## Spacer

Sensory Man

RUSKOROP RUSKOROP 028 (C) LP

## Juryman Y Spacer

Mad Order Justice

SARCAPHOP 0615 168 168 (C) LP

## Howie B

Turn The Dark Off

POLYDOR 537 934 CORPUS

Frontless music, by which one might mean a range of compositional possibilities, is not so new a thing as the PR puff would have us believe. Although Spacer, Howie B and





## The X-pressions

X-pressions  
ASHMOLE 0973 CDLP

### Rob Swift

Souful Fruit  
STONES THROW SP0007 CDLP

Since *Invisible Scratch Pickin'* is only commercial release in 1997 has been the excellent "Invisible Scratch Pickin' Vs. Da Clamz U Do Dat" single. The X-Men's (here The X-pressions for legal reasons) X-pressions is the first commercially available album by a turntable crew. The "What will we juggle/scratch?" problem of copyrighted material is only one of two major obstacles for the studio turntablist. The other is, simply, no one can see you on a recording. Live, The X-Men are as much dancers as they are musicians. You might imagine the flying hands, but how can you hear all the elbow moves, behind-the-back reaches, the clockwork ballet of functional and symbolic body movement? Will the casual listener know what was sampled and what was backspin on X-pressions? Without the performance, will it matter?

X-pressions comes complete with hi-fi sound, a host of guest rappers, dialogue interludes, the whole nine yards of current HipHop. Mistakes are, by comparison, a hazy, raw lot, closer to the live experience, a practice shaped in large part by doing battle routines at composers like the DMX and JTF Championships. Two or three minutes long, routines are the sack and trade of the competing turntablist. The best tracks

on X-pressions, "Get Started," "The Countdown" and the excellent "Mad Flava," fall into this category. Here, X-Men Rob Swift, Roc Raida, Total Eclipse and Joe Sinista assume the roles of a traditional group, playing "toons," "drums" and "basslines" with records. With drum loops created manually by scratching back and forth between two copies of the same record played on turntables one and two—the oft-cited, rarely-heard original Old School method—the pressure is on to be both creative and relatively in time. It's a great tension, and the slight lags in tempo heighten the sense of music happening. The one-man routine is represented here by Total Eclipse's "Turntable Exhibition," wherein "It Takes Two" becomes "It Takes One." It's a great example of how a DJ can isolate several bars of a record, change its time signature, scribble in the static and suction to make something funky but fractal and unstable rise up out of nowhere. These tracks are snippets of the "How did he do that?" thrill that comes with seeing them prepared live in front of you, but they are sat irreducibly weird and disobedient.

From there, The X-Men's supernatural skills falter. There are some OK instrumentals, which don't really make for compelling listening. Since Sinista looks off the album by announcing "We don't have to play the background anymore," it seems odd they'd give a third of the album over to someone else's foreground. I could listen to an hour of the slashing and crackly beat autopsies but perhaps they fear most people wouldn't. Making X-pressions fit into the current HipHop syntax hides The X-Men's light under the wrong bushel.

Mistakes are still the turntablist's way of communicating with each other and their audience, and there are a few great ones still available at only the same front level. Rob Swift's *Souful Fruit* is a low-key, catholic treatise with a more satisfying organic unity than X-pressions. The majority of it is scratching over manually looped soul records. Roc Raida and Mista Sinista appear, as does former EPMD DJ Diamond J. Suitably raw is Rob Swift's live 14 minute battle with Rahzel. The Human Beatbox from The Roots, a battle royale of mimicry and funny noses. "A Turntable Experience," a rumbling all-turntable construction featured on the Om bellow *Deep Concentration* compilation, also appears here. "Diamond J Spins It" is a sticky and rough highlight.

By default or design, *Souful Fruit* leans less on sampling and production values, more on the possibilities of vinyl and turntables. Here's hoping that turntablists retain that improvisational, material core of their language, as the world has plenty of middling HipHop and not enough noisy, fun, radical popular art.

SASHA FRIERE-JONES

Henry Cow vocalist Dagmar Krause crops up to read the poem in "6 Down" is pretty difficult, but once done, it's easy to focus on the rhythms and shuddering effects (Pete Moore, the son of Krause and Cow's Anthony Moore, contributes keyboards, guitar and drums). There are some backstage junk elements to *Plat Order Justice*, but its best bits are when it turns itself over into a mighty, chugging samba rhythm (which might, utopianists like note, make the perfect soundtrack for urban jogging).

Mercifully, Howe's latest album—chunky beboppers and some delicately poised dephlegmated bops—is an object lesson in how to flout genres. Made with wit and occasional sense of purpose, Howe's music—and *Turn The Dark Off* is no exception—has the wonderful ability to get to the point. No noodling, no meandering. This is highly designed dance music, with so deep a shine that you can see 20 years' worth of music reflected in its surfaces.

LOUISE GRAY

## Toru Takemitsu

The Film Music Of Toru Takemitsu  
Nonesuch/Nonesuch 92485 71434 CD

In Japan there has traditionally been a jarring element to artistic activity that helped prevent the formation of stultifying rigid hierarchies of high and low forms. Just as say, Mishima could write popular romances and more complex novels without compromising his status, so could the likes of Akira Kurosawa (Gorodski) and, here, Toru Takemitsu (1930-96), compose for the cinema without jeopardizing their concert hall reputation.

That's not to say nobility doesn't exist in Japan, but going by its open-hearted writings quoted in the sleeve notes, Takemitsu's music was enriched by both his cultural mobility and his love of every variety of cinema, indeed, so deep was his love—on average he saw 300 films a year—it's a wonder he ever found time to write for it. This disc contains just ten examples of his 93 film scores, seven of them from the original soundtracks and three more re-recorded by The London Sinfonietta under John Adams. Even in this limited selection the depth and range of his work is staggering. The films covered include historical romances, Samurai's Empire Of

Reason, Teshigahara's *Ryujin*, existential drama *Twelve Monkeys*, *The Fox Of Anzai* and *Woman In The Dunes*, a sentimental street movie (Kurosawa's *Dobermann*) and a sexy porno picture (Kobayashi's *Kasuki*). Regardless of the picture's status, Takemitsu relished the challenge of tracking the psychology connecting the storyline and the image. To do so he drew on a broad palette of sounds and styles, be they Western orchestral or (more rarely, in context of this disc) Japanese traditional. His use of the binaural for the samurai picture *Horror* might

manner of others might not have been possible three decades ago, it was only because the technology mitigated against it. Their essence was certainly imaginable, just as their music—so staidist collages of fragmented sounds—were. So in this age where digital delights are available to all and sundry, where does it lie? The same place as any other, with innovators and followers. And so, to take things in reverse order.

Working as Spacer, Luke Gordon's previous releases, *Atlas Echo* and *Contrastion* were

heretofore for their broad brushstrokes of noise, for their survival and ambitious quality. Whether they were or not is open to debate, what is clear, perhaps, is that while *Sensory Man* makes a pleasant enough progression from start to finish, its net effect is somewhat underwhelming. It's the standard dabble that one's come to expect from dabblers who have a few drum 'n' bass records in their home studios, alongside some thumping Michael Nyman soundtracks and a belief that the discontinuities of a Bop-like voice combined with some cocktail lounge jazz is somehow

like, radical, cool. In this case, the collaboration of Gordon with his small group—which includes Alan (Orbital) Goldspink on vocals, sax player Chris Bowden and Ian (Juryman) Simmons—leads less to the blurred boundaries than an incoherent sense of 'why bother?' It describes a journey going nowhere.

Sooner and Juryman's collaboration on *Plat Order Justice* is, peritensive and paranoid lyrics aside, slightly better. Admittedly dispensing with flat-voiced rappers about prophets, fools and conformity (former



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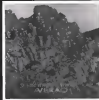
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helpfully suggest period and place, but more importantly underscores the isolation of the impoverished samurai brought to the final act by a conspiracy of inoffensive social codes and historical circumstance. But for another historical picture, *Requiem* Takemitsu simultaneously gazes in temporal and spatial elements, and the requirements of the plot with a highly individual fusion of Orientalism and Western baroque. At 15 minutes — this wonderful collection's longest and most satisfying piece — *Requiem* demonstrates the full depth of Takemitsu's audacity, as the music shifts from child string passages, a solitary trilling flute, low bass rumbles and, finally, a respite of a baroque church gloom. Meanwhile, even without the image, it's easy to imagine the three-dimensional effect on the film resulting from the composer's placing of instrumental sounds in the mix.

When necessary, Takemitsu's music could also be light and witty — check the "McArthur Park" pastiche for the melodramatic. Katsuei — but psychologically darker works endure better, and this disc closes with one of the best, the electronically enhanced string score for *Woman in the Dunes*. In the process of situating the tonal certainties of the instruments, Takemitsu keeps you in the frame of mind of the film's cosmopolitan protagonists, whose world has suddenly been reduced to a hole filling with sand, which he must constantly clear away or be buried alive in it.

That film's plot could almost work as a metaphor for anyone only now discovering Takemitsu — the prospect of being deluged in his life's work is just as forbidding but a whole lot more beguiling.

**SIEGA KUPP**

## Terre Thaemlitz

Couture Couture

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## Terre Thaemlitz

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In all the talk (or should that be discourse?) generated over Techno and its relationship to the body in recent years, one topic has been conspicuous by its absence: To date we've had the perfect, utopian body as created by Kraftwerk (a group who never publicly stepped outside their act), the technological bodies of Detroit Techno, the exuberant (black, gay) bodies of disco and Chicago House, and most recently, the play that librett makes on deconstructed bodies. The body politic, the body fantastic, but the gendered body? Is there room for it? The discourse surrounding Techno has, after all, focused on the collapse of any sense of real body. Surely there is no need for its logical (and contrary) argument on reconstruction? Well, actually there is. If digital technology can create the sonic re-orderings of which Techno speaks, then perhaps it might be

time to consider how the music's creators align themselves.

Of course, it is tempting to speculate as to why discourses surrounding gender and music usually founder. Considering that gender is so often thought of as 'given,' many are deeply uncomfortable at questioning it, one reason among many why Terre Thaemlitz's body of work is interesting. The cover picture to *GARL* details a bandwidth in which stand three figures: male at one end, female at the other, intermediate in between. And as if to press a point home, the cover of *Couture Cosmique* flips open to reveal a couple, beige coloured CD, the whole affair seeming rather like a powder compact. A point, if not the point, to Thaemlitz's work is to remitate music as a playful activity which does not shirk its political connotations. Self-conscious enough to be camp, it is also blatantly queer. And, lest anyone miss this, Thaemlitz's albums are supplied with ample essays secreted away in their sleeves. Reading them, it has to be said, takes rather more energy than listening. Whether rhythmically based (as on *Couture Cosmique*), Thaemlitz's music combines wit with passion. As *De Roboter Roboto*, his previous album of readings through Kraftwerk, showed, Thaemlitz is at pains to provide his music with specific orientation points. On *GARL*, those points are moments in club history, right down to some heavy duty Larry Heard homages. *Cosmique*'s are in a debate about power and technology — how could it not be with track titles such as "Trans Am (Transgendered American)"? The joke of *GARL* is that the question contained in the anthems of so much post-Finger's Inc. club music, namely "Can You Feel It?", is never asked. It is a rhetorical absence. These are records where great theory matches their sound. And their advent is long overdue.

**LOUISE GRAY**

## Various Artists

Anthology Of American Folk Music

Musica  
SYNTHESONIAN FOLKWAYS PP 251-3 6CD

Whether it's a reaction to ever-encroaching technology or just morose re-tapes updating their old record collections, the reissue of the iconic Alan Lomax collection and the marvellous re-emergence of the Stanley Brothers' first recordings on John Fahey's Revenant label have made this the most fruitful year of American folk music in recent memory. The crowning glory, though, has been the CD reissue of the *Anthology Of American Folk Music*. In the US, it has been nothing short of an event: not only have record stores in New York been unable to keep the thing in stock — remarkable for a CD collection weighing in at around \$50 — but it's even been granted coverage in youth lifestyle magazines.

The *Anthology Of American Folk Music*

originally appeared in 1952 and was compiled by the experimental film maker, wanderer, teacher and record collector Harry Smith from 78s that were recorded in the late 20s and early 30s. It's the stuff of legends. Grief Marcus has made a career out of writing about it, it's been the source of inspiration for everyone from The Grateful Dead and Canned Heat to Nick Cave and James Addickson, and it was the Rosetta Stone of the folk revival in the 60s. The anthology's impact, and its genius was the result of Smith's vision of a single America where Appalachian ballads, Acadian one-steps, coal-mining ballads, Delta blues, Piedmont blues, Texas blues, half-remembered English and Irish shanties and Baptist spirituals all fit together as if they were meant to.

With the kind of music Smith collected and the way it sounds now, 50 years later, the temptation is to mythologise. Indeed, the stylistic integration that makes it difficult to differentiate white artists from black ones speaks of a kind of realisation of the fabled American experiment — despite all the evidence to the contrary. (The anthology implicitly acknowledges the black influence on the work of some of the artists who are the foundation of Country music: Kelly Harrell and The Virginia String Band, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, coal miner Frank Hutchison and The Carter Family — all of whom were taught or learned part of their repertoire from African-American musicians.)

It's music with the weight of history behind it, but listened to in isolation the anthology also contains some of the most emotive and technically impressive music ever recorded. Much of it, particularly the fiddle-guitar breakdowns and stomps, hasn't been improved on in over 50 years of trying. It's a stark and beautiful testament to the power of simplicity and with the possible exception of the James Brown Star Time box set, the most stunning album ever put together.

**PETER SHAPIRO**

## Various Artists

Guitars On Mars

VIRGIN APRIL 24 XCD

The Virgin Ambient series — now only 'Ambient' in its abbreviated catalogue numbers — has yielded some excellent compilations: Cosmic, Kuruzi, Monsters and Monsters, Robots And Bug Film, for example. And adding to this list of exotic and eclectic music are the increasing number of ever-so-slightly tedious spin-off CDs from David Toop's book *Ocean Of Sound*. Following *Crooning On Venus* and *Mooning On Pluto* comes *Guitars On Mars*. What next? *Synthesizers On Saturn*? A Topick features on here as well, but ultimately the sheer quality of these imaginative selections evades any cynical responses. Some omissions are unavoidable (in his sleeve note, Toop refers to the "regrettable absence" of Bo Diddley, Johnny Guitar Watson, Speedy West, Sonny



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## soundcheck

Shamrock and Funkadelic's Eddie Hazel! But then *Guitar: On Flairs* in pursuing to be a definitive collection of the 30 plus best guitar tracks of all time. On the contrary, Hendrix aside, it bypasses the accepted guitar pantheon altogether (Page, Clapton, etc.) in favor of a lot more beguiling and idiosyncratic history for this most abused of instruments.

It's still a thrill to hear the guitar's parameters being pushed, sometimes to the point of sounding like another instrument entirely — or indeed, not like an instrument at all. In terms of abstract atmospherics the pastoral still-life of "Symphony Space" by Spiritualized and Merzbow's untrammelled noise storms on "Eat Beat Eat #2" sit at the two polar extremes, while Hendrix's "The Smiling Of The Arms" — a particularly sought-after version of "The Star Spangled Banner" — still sounds like America well burning up in a furnace of love and hatred.

The two hours of music here is virtually all highlights, but the squalling Improv of Ray Russell on "Stained Angel Morning" and A Small Good Thing's vast, parched spaces on "Gulch" deserve special mention. And Gary Lucas wrestling with the tortuous anti-logic of Captain Beefheart's solo guitar composition "Evering Bell" still enthralls. It's not all difficult music either, with excellent contributions of archaic waltzes by The Ventures and Joe Meek & The Blue Men. One of the best songs is Link Wray's primeval "Rumble" followed by Dave Allan And The Arrows' "Missing Link," the pair adding up to an utterly feral rock 'n' roll blow out.

**PHIL BARNES**

### Various Artists

Plug Research And Development  
PLUG RESEARCH 010 COLP

Run by Angelinos Joe Babylon and Allen Aweasner, Plug Research is a Californian label devoted to collecting the snorer whippers and future mavericks of decaying circuit boards and insect legs. UK analogues to the nominal Techno on Plug Research And Development might be the pared-electronic logorhythms of the flash label and the less disco-y tracks on Indul.

Indeed, both Allen Fernandez (head of Indul) and Mark Broom (Rach Hondo) contribute tracks that are representative of the album's approach. Fernandez, appearing here as Baxters Over Venice, freizes the momentum of the guitar sample from a dancefloor hit of a few years ago on "Pik Gentle," while Broom (as New Machine with Stacey's Steve Picton) creates a rather stunning dubbed-out blackpace on "Gn." Indeed, the procted, nibbling drum beats on "Gn" seem to set the tone for the rest of the record as a collection of machine rhythms that expand and contract like the heaving of a massed net of roaches. TDS's "Self-Tapper," PhiloCarpine's "Wardship" and Smuglyears's "Om Pankar

Och Uktaykash" all feel as though their bleats, cicks, crackles, pops and clicks are easing away at the tracks from inside out.

Another semi-noise-track is contributed by Babylon and Aweasner recording as Winch. Unlike the other tracks, though, "Skid" utilizes a prevailing rhythm which is undercut by quiet Konkrete-esque electronic disjuncts and tape glitches. The rest of Plug Research And Development, it's a fascinating glimpse at the possibilities of an interaction between machine funk and degraded abstraction.

**PETER SHAPIRO**

### Various Artists

Slam! Shamrock  
SLAM! SHAMROCK 00

### Various Artists

0161  
SHAMROCK 01

Slam are Manchester-based purveyors of free electronic music. Shamrock seems to promote their roster in America, although the label is hardly a household name in the UK. Perhaps that's why Shamrock is relatively easy on the ear. It comes in an all-black jewel case with illegible bubble stickers, and, as the press release puts it, "two hidden tracks secretly loaded away within" (he tapped on the lid, undisturbed and unannounced, although the cartoonish closer is amusing enough). The disc kicks off with the playful computer game music of Legs Feet, and throughout the mood is buoyant, even playful, with an emphasis on relatively clearly synthesized sounds. As a result, the whole thing seems to skip by without leaving a single ripple in the mood of the day. Three of the 12 credited tracks are exclusives, including one of two tracks by Gersonix, aka, Aweasner, the label's star turn. This, a remix, is a bit of a disappointment, bringing Aweasner closer to staple post-HipHop/Electronic middle ground.

Altographer darker in its presentation, D161 compiles 14 new selections and adorns them with monochrome photographs of the Manchester track-bomb and its aftermath. This inner city maelstrom may cast a pall of dark sanity over the music, but not necessarily. Audionormies' "Probe" courts a contrasting, if over-luminous, floating in space ambience. Other moments also make recourse to the generic, such as Dastard's "Darkcore 'Nigritude'," but these are in the minority and they're not actually that bad. In fact, this is one quality release. Gersonix feature again, rubbing shoulders with The Fall, of all people, whose "Providence" sits just fine in varied and resourceful company. The pikes that open and close proceedings (by MidPlan Jan and Professor Brodum) are abrasive and tongue in cheek in turn. They may be the most abstract cuts, but unlike Shamrock, D161 greets your attention from the start, holds it and rewards it well. Keep your eyes open for

Slam releases in the future. To the eye they may be dark, unassuming little things, but all that glitters...

**DAVID OWEN**

### Various Artists

The Spirit Of Vampyroes Lesbos  
SOLARUM 00 000 00

Two years ago the Crippled Dick Hot Wax label released the soundtrack to a 1968 porno movie called Vampyroes Lesbos. This valued contribution to the mid-90s fascination with musical sleaze has now produced a spinoff on Solarum, a German division of Crippled Dick. 13 tracks inspired by the "spirit" of the soundtrack. I expected more of a loopy juggle of a record, grooving under the looming weight of sampled sleaze and heavy breathing. But the idea is that this is an excellent collection of "progressive" dancefloor items, its relationship to the film is oblique — well, at night, the track by Doctors Hi-Fi has an organ after three minutes, but that's three minutes of crisp dub in seven time. The opening tunes are cool but exhilarating, Minus B, Higher Than God and Dr Israel spin delicate drum 'n' bass webs under thin phaseres of electric piano and distorted star. Later there's the fading Techno and nervous effects feakery of Two Lone Swordsmen, and Alec Empire's jazz stylings on miniature keyboards, like some unhealthy bar band from Saturn. Full marks also to the tracing weirdness of Cristian Vogel's deep-dred experimentation — his overdriven sounds seem on the point of bursting. No one gets particularly provocative, though. Witchman skews up the windows a tad with his dreamscape of beguiling Spanish guitar, moodily wistful and the repeated imperative to "make love." I'd like to mention track titles, but I just can't read them — are typefaces getting smaller or do I need thicker glasses? Best track is Dr Roden's confident strut, all Electro beats and sudden dashes — wickedly witty and accomplished. Only sweet and recommended.

**CLIVE BELL**

### John Wobble

The Light Programme  
3018187 000 00

Whatever gods the ever prolific Wobble has on his side — this is his 30th album. Since 1995 — they are very musical ones. His last release, *The Cliché Poets*, was a Cetically infected concept album, but this time he's blown away the clouds of mysticism and gone back to doing what he does best — although rarely as well as this monumental electronic funk, whose zeal is as much to be found in its musicality as its spirituality.

The line-up from Poets is still pretty much intact — Jake Liebeck on drums, D Jan Luo (Chupi) and old faithful guitarist and co-producer Mark Pender. This collection's

irrefutably better than its predecessor, however. Rast contemplation gives way here to slinking sensuality and disincubate.

Wobble has mused on the possible onset of old-hypnotism. Indeed the profundity and musical sophistication of this album is more 1972 than 1997. Witness the skittering Hammond organ chords and chaotic polyrhythms that introduce "One In 7". The tiny, chromatic, clashes of melody and bassline, indeed the sheer range of Wobble's melodic thought, reveal a composer of rare resourcefulness. The burial of his bass in the mix, however, is disappointing. This, though, is a small price to pay for his discovery of European tonality, and how to harness it to dance music — a skill Weather Report eventually lost over so many albums. B-move! Horror soundtracks with dub bassline? Second Venice music with Junglist drum henge? It's all here.

**PAUL STUMP**

### Z-Rock Hawaii

Z-Rock Hawaii  
NIPP GUITAR NIPP 121421 CD

This extreme odyssey — featuring key members of Osaka group The Boredoms jamming alongside US "recording whizzes" Ween — must have seemed like a great idea when discussed around the table of Gene and Dean Ween's local in the small hours of the morning. What emerges from the wreckage, however, comes across sounding somewhat sized and confused. Too many heads have been put together to realise the project, and rather than being an integral cog in the rock machine, the various gulf contributions that Eye and his fellow Boredoms make sit awkwardly next to the comely punk ramble that Ween slam into.

Admittedly a lot of this is fun. Z-Rock Hawaii's reworking of George Thorogood And The Destroyers' greatest hit "Bad To The Bone" is full of leg pumping charm (even though Killdazer pulled off a similar stunt years ago with their misunderstood *For Ladies Only* album) and their (unintentional?) homage to Zappa's "Dinah-Pow Humm" riff on "Love Like Cement" is knowingly enjoyable. But the full mainia of this collaboration remains stubbornly on hold. When something genuinely interesting surfaces — like at the beginning of "God In My Bed" — it is soon squashed flat under the tread of yet another musical pun, where everybody from The Residents to Neil lines is subliminally loaded into Z-Rock Hawaii's roasting mix. The best song here is "Heaven", a haunting Boredoms-manipulated bonus track unconsciously tacked on to the end. It clearly shows where this supergroup should have been heading much earlier. To quote the title of Ween's greatest song to date (from their 1990 debut album *God Ween Stony The Oneness*): "You Fucked Up!"

**EDWIN POUNCEY**

The Bewitched  
Composers Recordings, Inc.  
73 Spring Street, #506  
New York, NY 10012  
(212) 941-9673  
[www.composersrecordings.com](http://www.composersrecordings.com)

# in brief **Electronica**

Reviewed by **Tim Owen**

## **Beatsystem** Beatsystem

EMI 7293 CD

### **Arno Peeters** ArnoSon mix

PLATINUM 1913 CD

"No More," the lead-out track on Derek Peeters' otherwise one-man Beatsystem project, incorporates live Pans. Felix style blues guitar and vocal samples into a stark minimalist drone punctuated by funeral percussion and cacha thraps. "Spooky Action At A Distance" similarly evokes an Indian classical drone. Other tracks are less successful, typically populating sparse drones with the garish of embellishments.

Compared to the Beatsystem's aural specificity, Arno Peeters's ArnoSon is serious stuff, prepared as a contribution to the 1996 International Forum Of Electroacoustic Music from computer-generated graphic scores. Peeters utilizes found sounds grouped into 12 categories, including "nature sounds," "energy and sounds," "Deep sounds or spheres," "morph" and "voices." This is a concise abstraction, whose musical shape is evidently of some significance to the composer, if indecipherable to the listener. Its over-reliance on found vocal samples expose a limited musical talent. Not bad as pure console though.

## **Conemelt** 242 Carat Conemelt s.t.

ELC004 CD

Conemelt make unabashedly commercial music which they package as ultimate indie anti-image DIY. They are, we're told, "on a mission to put hard groove back into dance music." Well, they're not entirely unsuccessful, though I doubt a hard groove was entirely absent from dance music in the first place. No matter, this is an engaging set, offering plenty to listen to without knocking potential dancers off their rhythm. Conemelt bring in a bit of acid dance genres but don't succumb to cliché or convention. If I ever throw another party, this would have to be a contender for the soundtrack.

## **Christoph De Babalon** If You're Into It I'm Out Of It

BAROKO 0400 CD

This is jungle in extremis from Alec Emparis's Digital Hardcore imprint, with Barokko Electronics passages for light relief. Who readers should know, if you'll excuse the pun, the chit if they're into it adheres to a spartan aesthetic which less you know exactly what to expect, an opening 15 minute slice of ominous Ambient brooding, seven slices of Industrial Techno/Jungle blend with an interlude of soothing balm ten

minutes of even darker ambience, and a track which attempts to synthesise the whole to close. All rather nicely done, if too austere to really learn to, by an evidently serious young man.

## **Dub Sonic** Dub Fantasy

CRUISE 001 CD

## **Hoi Voodoo** Fast Video

CRUISE 001 CD

After an opening track of unexceptional studio Techno, Dub Sonic start to earn their dub credentials by variously slowing their beats to a lumbering crawl or speeding them up again in an industrial genre, while adding layers of distortion, sax squeals and guitar electricity to four live tracks — the undoubted highlights — credited to Dub Sonic Warrior. Dub Sonic's Starship Anantara takes things further into jazz territory on the finale, a subtly Sonix RA diffusion with low strings and flute. Hoie Come on like the offspring of Boredoms, all tacky drum machine and blatant Funk samples, combined with the kind of bookiness that juxtaposes the 1812 Overture with tiny beethoven and shiny happy computer gaming. The sound: sick of Western-Oriental consumer madison run amok, kitch to the max.

## **Andre Gurov** A New Rap

LANGUAGE 102 HOUSE RECORDS

While Gurov's New Rap Language isn't fit for the vineyard and arrogant machismo of cliché old-school Gangsta, it's relentlessly insistent, raw, boned, brass beats do echo other traditions. DJ Cam is an obvious name check, and in "Lifeime Phonologue" the rap occasionally recalls the delivery of Q-Tip, albeit in French. Gurov has found some superb collaborators in the shape of Daniel Pemberton, whose approach enriches Gurov's with additional atmospheric, and DJ Handdown, who takes Gurov's sound a little further out without diluting the aesthetic. As a sample suite, "No singe" on it, straight headbangers, no R&B music, nothing like that, just straight HipHop", and then some.

## **Karma** Pad Sounds

GRAND 001 CD

Karma's A New Age outfit for the tail end of the 90s. Soothing, even soporific, at lengths, and thoroughly inoffensive. However, there is an underlying awareness of HipHop and the more ranted end of the Electronica spectrum which makes Pad Sounds more engaging than it first seems. It is a very

prepossessing sound, however, too easily dismissed as Muzak, but not really very newsworthy. Electronica, like perhaps it's hard to imagine it engendering any reaction other than ambivalence.

## **Bill Laswell** Oscillations

REMYXES 508 0054 SAT 22 CD

The various artists collectively responsible for the collection of remixes are generally so consummate that the quality of their productions can be taken for granted. Endemic Vind. Vedic, Scanner, Kics, DJ Gradstrop, U, Adam Hain, Bisk, and Soul Static Sound each take a stab at versioning Laswell's take on drum 'n' bass. Deceasingly, you don't have to get far into the disc, before you realize how hard it is to distinguish one remix from another, excepting in small details like, say, Vedic's introductory motifs. But it's brief contribution bears their unmistakable signature, despite being a country mile from their usual territory. Unlike the whole affair seems redundantly generic.

## **Piano Magic** Popular

MECHANICS 040 001 CD

Piano Magic kick off their CD with a blast of frenetic drum 'n' noise, but soon settle down to crafting a delightfully measured album of ethereal electronic pop and atmospheric soundscapes, which they describe as "Small [beat, low-die], neo-classical." The record incorporates spoken word, low-key machine stress, and pellucid acoustic intrusions in a seamless whole. Their effortless integration of disparate elements goes about its business with an unprepossessing subtlety which belies the intricacies of its construction. Few other releases occupy this fertile middle ground between ambience and experimentation, between know and abstraction, and none I know of succeeds with such effortless finesse. Highly recommended.

## **Sandoz** God Bless The

CONCEPTORY 040 001 CD

Sandoz, aka Richard H. Kirk, used to be in Cabaret Voltaire. Maybe he isn't, it isn't really relevant. This is his fifth Sandoz release, and apparently marks a move away from world music influences and into the vaguish terrain of virtual narrative. The six tracks each explore a different esle at some length, using building blocks of funk, jazz and light drum 'n' bass. But this is essentially a panoramic take on tech-ed-up House. Kirk's ear is always well in tune with the demands of a keen club-going audience.

## **Sketch** Abeyance

MADEIRA 040 001 CD

Two discs worth of active ambience from Norway, but impossible to characterise in the usual Scandinavian terms, cold, dark and icy. It isn't. If the earth tilted on its axis,

plunging the Arctic circle further towards the tropics, you might end up with a sound like Sketch — the first disc of Abeyance is a supporting, steamy swamp, teeming and bubbling with fertile, furive incident (none of the frosted stases of a Kowar here). "Mellow" is all minor bird calls and howler monkey shrieks as the sun breaks through the branches, you can almost picture the accompanying computer animation. Disc two is closer to the duo's 1994 album on R&S, Abeyance To Snow, with gentle zephyrs of gentle glinting and shimmering in the west. If things get a little too Sun Electric for comfort occasionally, they're offset by the gamelan, glitter of tracks like "Enemy Territory" biodiversity is the key to the Sketch blueprint. (Rob Young)

## **A Small Good Thing** Block

BMV 2 CD

Plenty of action on the latest release from this trio of D Yuku Conguine releases, most of it taking place in an imaginary world block (hence the title). Unlike the majority of one-track enslave soundtrack ponies

Joanmeyer, Space or an ASG in bag with a strong, fully formed narrative behind, creating a complex, rich work, that doesn't rely on a one-dimensional clutch of John Berry samples for dramatic effect. A cut-up shooting script, embedded in the CD's lavish booklet, doesn't wholly clarify matters any, but that's to be expected, with in Godard territory here. No Marchand-horror, after all. Some of the music is truly riveting: trumpets, turntable mismanagement, telephones, hi-pot percussion, and rhythms taking to pieces like century-old paint, are all buttered down into the mix. Over this, each track contains its own voice speaking an internal monologue, a dysfunctional and urban poetry leaving enough loose ends for a sequel. (Rob Young)

## **Subtle Tense** The Gongs Of An

ELC004 CD

Subtle Tense meet a 90s Electronica sensibility into a curiously 80s take on abstract pop with plenty of room for whimsy. Like check those vocals on "Moodies Schwing!" The opening track "Overlooking 1" is a modest classic, regardless of genre, the following "Fantaz" blends New Order rhythms and cheery Euro holiday elements, and "Decection Set Rhythms" evokes the comeback. The Human League could have made (reinforced by Angeleika Wexler's vocals). From here on in things get very strange indeed. As the group features members of Cologne artists Workshop (word rockers) and Whitford Productions (longue-in-check, disco), the press release amplifies a "New Klang Classification" for these ears they're more Gong than Can, or perhaps a hybrid of the two.

# new notes at a glance

## information from SPNM

new notes, the monthly listings magazine published by SPNM, is an essential guide to what's happening in new music, specialising in the compact music circuit. Events listed in full in new notes are summarised on this page.

In November SPNM visits the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival with four specially written new works for music theatre. Why not join us? To find out more  
T 0117 928 8996 F 0117 931 9520 E [spnm@spnm.org.uk](mailto:spnm@spnm.org.uk)

**1 Bath Camerata**  
Head, Piers-Evans, Picot  
Aber College, Old Gilders Rd  
Aber, Hants 01705 582255

**Organ Recital**  
Beat, Koomars, Bruns  
The Cathedral, Manchester M5  
0161 833 2220

**Zwischenspiel**  
Birrell\*\*\* Obermayer\*\*\*  
JCA

**The Cornelius Gardew Ensemble**  
Gardew, Zappa, Wolff, Montague  
The Pinnace Theatre, Sheffield S10  
0114 249 5185

**2 The Piano Music of John McLeod**  
McLeod  
Royal Academy of Music, London  
WPI 0151 441 5459

**Zwischenspiel**  
Hodgkinson\*\* Wals\*\*\*  
JCA

**Pacific Voices**  
Duke, Sutcliffe\*\* Beglarian, Farnshaw, Vine, Edwards\*\*\*  
WPI

**3 BBC Symphony Orchestra**  
Ponderecki, Symonowicz  
WPI

**4 Ensemble QTR**  
O'Neill\*, LeFaine, Hodson\*\*\* Bousted\*, Agnes\*\*\*  
BMAC

**Twice Through the Heart & House of the Dead**  
Turnage, Janacek  
London Coliseum, London WC2  
0171 632 6300

**4-8 Jigsaw Music Theatre**  
Barsh\*, Wargo\*  
Wor Road Concert Hall,  
Shrewsbury Theatre, 15 Gorse St  
London WC1 0171 588 8822

**5 London Philharmonic Orchestra**  
Dove\*\*\* Mozart, Bruckner  
WPI

**London Guitar Trio**  
Honey\*\*\* Glardino\*\*, Solovy\*\*\*  
Hamson\*\* Stravinsky  
Hulme Music Room, Oxford OX1  
452 2875

**5 Chillingian Quartet**  
Saxton\*\*\*  
BN

**Rainbow across Europe**  
Trio Musique Improvisée  
Molotov Tigerz Centre, Newson  
Park, Bath BA2 01225 463362

**6 BCM C20th Ensemble**  
Barnard, Francesconi, Michalchuk  
Concert Hall, Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road,  
London SW7 0171 589 3563

**Psappha**  
Armstrong, Yeats\*\*\* Holt, Maxwell Davies  
Sons Group Concert Hall, RVCMA,  
Claydon Road, Manchester M13  
0161 307 5273

**Philharmonia Orchestra**  
Lips, Barlow, Bonneau  
BN

**Rainbow across Europe**  
Trio Jatz  
University Hall, Chelmsford  
Bath 01225 463362

**\*7-9 London Contemporary Piano Competition**  
Knight\*\*\* Hurst\*\*\* Mitchell\*\*\* eto  
London College of Music, Roudale  
Road, Ealing W5 0171 828 9636

**8 Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**  
Elgar, Walton, Vaughan Williams  
Philharmonie Hall, Hope St,  
Liverpool L1 0151 709 3789

**Cambridge New Music Players**  
Ligeti, Brahms  
Wor Road Concert Hall,  
Shrewsbury Theatre, 15 Gorse St  
London WC1 0171 588 8822

**New World A-Corin'**  
Binglton, Goss, Davis, Stravinsky eto  
Hershe  
QEH

**11 Philharmonia Orchestra**  
Debussy, Ligeti, Prokofiev  
BN

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra**  
Beethoven, Maxwell Davies\*  
BN

**11 Rainbow across Europe**  
van Uffert\*, Plompen\*,  
ten Holt\*\* Claretone\*  
University Hall, Chelmsford,  
Bath 01225 463362

**Corrado Canonici, double bass**  
Mazzoni, Ghezzi\*, Soles, Dabrowski\*, Finney, Xenakis, Feinberg, Rebner\*\*\*  
BMAC

**12 Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**  
Scharwenka  
Philharmonie Hall, Hope Street,  
Liverpool L1 0151 709 3789

**Centenary Celebration**  
Schoenbach eto Dervizian, Schubert  
BN

**13 Pipers 3**  
oboe trio -  
Fear no More  
Dubois, Grosse, Helling\*\*\*  
Beethoven, McGarr  
St John's Church, Fleet St, London  
EC4 0151 401 4024

**14 London Metropolitan Ensemble**  
Ligeti, Burgen, Ward, Malet  
JPI

**Lecture - Who Needs New Music?**  
McGarr & Pratt  
Graham Colly, Bernard's New  
Hall, Holborn London EC1  
0171 831 0575

**15 London Sinfonietta**  
Brexit, Castiglioni\*\* Ades\*, Baroque  
QEH

**16 The Ionian Singers**  
Ball, Scott, Redgate, Sawyer, Brian, Barnbridge  
JPS

**Black Hair**  
Bano, Marsh, Wilkinson\*\*\*  
Simulacrum\*\*\* stringer\*\*\*  
Gibbels  
Art Centre, York 01904 637129

**17 Athelais Sinfonietta**  
Ryder, Nodestoff\*, Wangler\*, Hayes\*\*\*  
Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer, Leamington Spa  
London EC1 0171 831 6151

**19 Madalena**  
Nunes\*, Oliveira, Branco\*, Pires\*, Lopes-Graca\*  
Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer, Leamington Spa  
London EC1 0171 831 6151

**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**  
Dobrin, Tolstokovsky, Martinu  
Philharmonie Hall, Hope Street,  
Liverpool, L1 0151 709 3789

**Rainbow across Europe**  
Canat de Chyry\*, Pascal\*, Leonardo\*, Schöenberg  
The Pump Room, Bath BA1  
01225 463362

**19-30 Huddersfield Festival**  
numerous composers  
01484 439538

**20 Sounds Positive**  
Series 10  
Sutton-Anderson, Lambert, Luf, Rotherburg, Carpenter, Jackson, Anderson  
JPS

**True Brit - Faces of a Nation**  
Myers, Bennett, Carpenter\*\*\* Field, Lawrence\*\*\*  
Bedford, Barrow  
JPS

**21 City of London Sinfonia**  
Britten, Maxwell Davies, Tippett  
BN

**Rainbow across Europe**  
Leopold, Koller, Garbanc, Melgarejo-Gil, Guy, Scienci, Pina, Reinhardt, Bates  
Empson Theatre, London  
Bath 01225 463362

**22 City of London Sinfonia**  
Tippett, Britten\*, Maxwell Davies\*\*  
BN

**23 Rothschild's Violin**  
Fleishman\*, Stokachov, Prokoviev, Vaughan Williams  
QEH

**Camden Choir**  
Kufia, Gonsky, MacMillan, Boulanger, Schubert  
JPS

**Archduke Piano Trio**  
Kornfeld, Tansman, Stokachov  
JPS

**\*25 Opera & Music Theatre**  
Harry\*\*\* Dubugnon\*\*\*  
Lopez-Figueroa/Hodges\*\*\*  
Potts/Duffy\*\*\*  
Lawrence Kelly Theatre  
Huddersfield HD1 01484 439538

**Beyond The Blue Horizon**  
Home\*  
QEH

**Margaret Sutherland Centenary**  
Sutherland, Grant, Kimes, Schultz, McMichael  
Aurora House, Dover Road,  
The Strand, London WC2  
0181 208 1541

**Music Collection**  
26 Mozart, Dunkl  
JPS

**27 Bingham Quartet & David Campbell**  
Haydn, MacMillan, Brahms  
JPS

**28 Helsinki University Chorus**  
Sibelius, Bergman, Rautavaara  
JPS

**29 Zwischenspiel**  
Wind & Miller\*\*\*  
Cusack\*\*\*  
JPS

**29 Rainbow across Europe**  
Gibson\*\*\* Smith, Lumbert\*\*\*  
Merton Building, Newson Park  
Bath BA2 01225 463362

**30 Zwischenspiel**  
Cutter\*\*\*  
JPS

**Rainbow across Europe**  
Thermy\*, Gibbon, Ebbw\*\*\*  
Molotov Tigerz Centre, Newson  
Park Bath BA2 01225 463362

**KEY:**  
\*1 SPNM event  
\*\*\* World Premiere  
\*\* UK Premiere  
\* London Premiere

BH: Barbican Hall, Silk Street, London EC2  
0171 638 8891  
BMIC: British Music Information Centre, Stratford Place, London W1 0171 499 8567  
GC: St Giles' Cripplegate, Barbican, London EC2  
0171 638 8891  
ICA: Institute of Contemporary Art, 12 Carfax House Terrace, London SW1 0171 930 3647  
JSS: St John's, Smith Square, London SW1 0171 222 1061  
RFH, QEH, PR: South Bank Centre, London SE1 0171 960 4242  
WH: Wigmore Hall, 36 Wigmore Street, London W1 0171 935 2141

new notes

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# in brief jazz

Reviewed by Will Montgomery

## Tatsu Aoki Live At Blue Rider Theatre INNOCENT EYES AND LENSES #10004 CD

Chicago-based bassist Tatsu Aoki is a major figure on the Asian-American improvised music scene. He's a versatile musician who's worked with people as diverse as Von Freeman and Fred Anderson. This album (and for incidentally by donations collected over the Internet) shows him to be more interested in working over simple low end motifs than in finger-flaming speed workouts. He has a dry way with a cello and a nice way of extracting a melodic fragment from the improvisations flow and then elaborating on it. Pedals are used sparingly, and a restless tug to the music leaves it moving.

## Bardo State Orchestra & Tibetan Buddhist Monks Wheels Within Wheels MAYIS ME CD 19057 CD

Bardo State Orchestra is the pet project of veteran US free jazz trumpeter player Jim Dwyer. Scottish drummer Ken Hyder, Brazilian bass player Marco Mantos, joined here by four Tibetan monks of the Swedish Tenney Dhangyeling Monastery in Nepal. This mixture of the sacred and the secular makes for an absorbing project — the monks let no on a series of ancient instruments that include conch shell and high-toned trumpets, large cymbals, and double-headed bass drum. Indeed, their fluidness and energy leave the BSD sounding somewhat flat, breathless and dog-eared by comparison. There is no way Dwyer can honestly compete with such an all-powerful drone. Eventually he simply stands and listens as the beautiful, unaltered music reaches its crescendo and disappears into air. *Wheels Within Wheels* takes a brave stab at uniting two different musical cultures, which, in this instance, prove incompatible. (Eden Records)

## The Andrew Cyrille Trio Good To Go SOUL NOTE 121 292 CD

Andrew Cyrille's work as a leader has far less intense than the music of former boss Cecil Taylor when his left in the mid-'60s or late-'70s collaborator David S. Ware. His drumming became tightly focused on pitch and precision and the music had less to do with freedom, though nothing could be further from what you'd expect. The self-asserted adventure of his early Soul Notes is retained in this album, made with a top featuring master flautist James Newton and bassist Lalo Adorno. There are two takes of a rolling, percussive tribute to Art Blakey and a

clutch of powerful tunes. Newton's playing is stamped with emotion and Cyrille supplies marvelously pointed percussion, playing around a beat sustained with force and subtlety.

## Malcolm Hayes Unique Horns 1997 RAINBOW ACUSTICS 8421 CD

Hayes is a Scottish musician resident in Italy plays two kinds of horn here: the valved horn dating back to the late 17th century — and the modern Fifties flut instrument. The first two pieces on the remarkable CD were recorded in a 16th century castle in the Alps. They're for solo horn and various mixed up spaces around the castle, the echoing spaces become a vital part of the music. Another piece draws on the classics in the speech of an elderly Scottish woman recounting a supernatural tale. "Pocca passage" combines various rhythmically opposed sounds of dripping water with, you guessed him. Finally there is an arrangement of part of Bach's *Concerto No. 4*. An album of rare richness of sound put together in a way that makes for challenging listening: a passing through metal tubes, like you never heard it before.

## Raphe Malik The Short Form FANTASY ME CD

Trumpeter Raphe Malik also worked with Cecil Taylor, passing through the Unit in the mid-1970s, though he's held on to a lot more of the line of his former boss's music than Cyrille (see above). He's an under-recorded figure, an intelligent soloist capable of weaving stinging energies to melody. This is a quietest session and he stands alongside tenorist Glenn Spearman who'll play it as fast and baroque as you like. With a swirling rhythm section the two take the fires in time honours fashion, coming up with line for line free jazz. This would all be unremarkable enough were Malik not such a resourceful trumpeter, but he bends his brass in entirely inventive ways.

## Oren Marshall Tame Space At Trafford Lightbulb Club CD

An album of active mood pieces from ubiquitous uber-tube man Marshall. His one else get the sounds out of the instrument like he does, like the massed electric tubes of the fuzzed rock of "Saturn's Pans" and it's alongside the gentle patterns of "Harry's Pan" and it's clear that Marshall's a one-off. Whether working with the sonorities of simple tuba or expanding these rich notes

electronically, he reveals a refreshingly deep sensitivity to sound. Nothing can undo the comic connotations that the instrument is bound up with, but Marshall is at his best when he works against them: the gliding tones of "Skybow" impress more than the title track for this very reason.

## Sakis Papadimitriou/Lefties Agouriades Plus And Minus 100 RECORDS 082 246 CD

Greek pianist Papadimitriou is an adept at piano effects. In the two live pieces here he's to be found executing some fascinating sonic moves. The tuned clanks and buzzes combine with straightforward playing and the virtuosic percussion and sensor contributions of Agouriades. Though Papadimitriou stretches the sounds of the piano in new directions, the actual work at the keyboard is as rock as — the studio material in particular shows him to be a careful, lyrical player, suspicious of dissonance. Of the two versions of "Sea Play", the prepared sounds of the second piece are for more eye-catching. Still, a strong musical personality is evident — worth investigating.

## Sten Sandell/Simon Steensland Under Clear (Radio Redna) USE A CD

Collaboration between keyboardist/therapist singer Sandell and avant-prog rocker Steensland, backed by a quartet of collaborators. Sandell is best known for his jazz and improv work, but this is utterly uncharacteristic. It's based mostly on rock rhythms, but makes use of harmonic/minor/major, and lashings of hungry trol vocalizing to come up with a bizarre range of textures. Recalling the doom priests that Neo drew out of the barmanium it's overwrought at times, but the daring instrumental combinations have to be applauded. The swirl and drag of "Over The City", for example, shows how rock can use a rich sound palette without a loss of dynamism or losing into the pitfalls of whorly.

## Matthew Shipp Before The World We Can Go

As yet another Ship comes in. Two long live solo performances from Matthew Shipp (the first) recorded in June, 1995. Sandwiching three studio pieces. Surprisingly perhaps, the all-starcaste interview reveals that he approached this performance with baroque music (baroque from his practice pieces) in mind. Certainly, his taste for mixing statements and percussive attack doesn't dominate here. There's considerable variety in his improvisations, but while the live numbers tend to drift in and out of focus the brief studio pieces are sharp and to the point, showing an appealingly economical handling of variations.

## Chris Speed Yeah No scenarios 55, 5511 CD

Chris Speed has long been making intelligent tenor sax contributions to various NY-based groups, including those of Dave Douglas and Tim Berne. In both his writing and his playing, he favours long repetitive lines, with a breathy tone and an ear open to rock and Arabic music. Chung Wu, on trumpet, makes an imaginative and quirky companion. Speed's compositions are strong — particularly the ballad "Nap Clarity" — but the most striking piece is the group composed "Fisula", a slow-moving creeper of a track on which Speed plays clarinet, while the group lean a long way out of their habitual sound spectrum intriguing stuff.

## Des Zee Winden/The Six Winds MASTERPIECE RECORDS 0700 CD

Giancarlo Nicolai Trio And John Tchicai/Giancarlo Nicolai Trio And John Tchicai 100 CD 164 CD

The Six Winds are an all-star line-up that grew out of a quartet established by baritone Ad Pienburg in the mid-1970s. With bass and baritone there's a flat bottom line and plenty of mobility in the top and through the use of both soprano and soprano. More involved in colour and composition than free-for-all or solo blasts, the group produce well-shaped work, but as so often with this kind of line-up, by the end of the CD the ears crying out for other sounds.

The Nicolai Tchicai album is a reissue of a 1989 album bolstered with additional material. Nicolai is an enigmatic guitarist, apt to make slightly distant commentary on the action. He's at his best on the long and ambitious "Superdroids", which moves from abstract string ticking into a series of adroitly ported statements. Afro-Dane Tchicai (who also appears on the Six Winds album) sounds great, able to throw himself into broad power playing and retain a featherlight touch on gentler material. His soprano work on the ballad "Nu Sed Du Komme" is particularly affecting. Overall it's ambitious music, all the musicians rooted in jazz but drawing understandingly on diverse sources.

## Carlos Zingaro Release From Triton Audio CD

Impression heavily laced with sampled and electronic sound from the Portuguese violinist. The disc is dense with atmospheres, much of them drawn from what you'd see like kicked string sections and bizarre percussion set-ups. The music is masked by the gulf between mournful, quavering assertions on violin and the other matter. It's a quality relationship, because while the violin work appears inviolated with feeling, it's hard to discern where the accompanying stuff is driving. At a busy and unsatisfying listen.



# in brief outer limits

Reviewed by Brian Duguid

## Circular Firing Squad Oxide

ARTIST RECORDS ART 1007 CD

You may shiver nervously at the prospect of Circular Firing Squad, a quartet of microcosmic composers, but fortunately Oxide is far more approachable than that suggests. Instead, three lengthy collaborations evince an intuitive structure and methodology. Despite some predictable synth work, the other sounds are far more disjunctive, with the frosty shards of well-out metal scattering the most enlivened chemical reverberations. There's even some scabrous samphora, a welcome contrast to the electroacoustic smoke screen. If at times it's a little cyanpunk, it's mostly pungent and imaginative, with "Inertialless Drum" demonstrating a caustic electronic rhythm that could be Aphex Twin in mu

## Delphium How Can You Hide From What Never Goes Away?

OUTSIDE OUTSIDE CD

Next to many of their musical points of comparison, Delphium have a surprising talent for wiry. This album touches on dark, ambient, ambient flavoured post-TripHop/Tangerine Dream electro pulse and gloomy soundtrack music without ever completely losing its sense of focus. The best piece "No Longer For Fear" matches Chris's understated surrealism, with contraptions of sonorous mechanisms eventually shot down by sudden bursts of repetitive beats. Occasionally, some of the rhythm loops are crudely edited together, but this is the only flaw in an otherwise accomplished album.

## Chris Farmer Getting Warm On The Trail Of Heat

WIRE HOT HOT CD

You want to-? We're got it. From the white noise, distortion and loopy wail cradle to the packaging, a white envelope with the photocopied handwritten track listing glued on, this is about as lo-fi as it gets. Even so, the music is a break-blending textual jolt with post-rock rhythm loops. It tends more towards abstract cacophony than most post-rockers, and that has to be a good thing. Squally with interludes and growling guitar, an eccentric atmosphere, clattering electronics and, at one point, even a triphop drum sound. In places it is unexpectedly gorgeous.

## Grey Area Grey Area

HARMONICS PIVOT CD

Now, if only the press release were true. "The unadorned sessions will soon be

available as a 173 CD boxed set, the first 1000 of which come in a stylish embossed titanium display cabinet." It isn't true, but Grey Area is still impressive post-rock from Australia's most interesting growers to a wide array of instrumental wackiness. At times the trance rhythms recall Stereolab elsewhere, the sampled voices bring Soacoheds to mind. Bubly Electronics sits alongside outsiders from 70s funk, while on one track an acoustic guitar lends a more personal feel.

## Ilios Encyclopedia

ARTIST ARTIST ARTIST CD

## George Smits Zboik Night

ROCK MUSIC NEW CD

It's often a mixed bag of experimental Electronics, with some of the most interesting and its oddly tuned surrealism carnal music. Demented electronic fantasies give way to a hybrid washing machine and freight train, polyrhythmic cleaning mechanisms play foetus with an alien in an incubator. Ultimately it's all too sketchy to satisfy. Smits's electronic and organic pop-based experiments are far more successful. They sound a lot like the grimey rhythms of Nocturnal Ensembles but with much more variety and even the occasional (sp?) tune. A little, possibly, for atmosphere reveals, with the sounds of strange organisms growling around, or a weird harmonic even. At times, it could be an instrumental Post-rock track, and despite Zboik Night Rodio's sketchiness, that's a compliment.

## PO Jörgens The Technology Of

TOSCH NEW WORLD MUSIC NEW CD

This is difficult music to locate: the instrumentation suggests it is modern composition, but the musical ease of listening suggests a less surly agenda. Jörgens's music is all percussion, with mambos, drums, and gongs joining scrap metal, but it's much more rhythmic than the likes of Zev or John Cage. It works best in small doses, and when timbre is allowed to dominate, thereby allowing shimmering overtones to flow together.

## Lehtisalo family

LEHTISALO FAMILY OUTSIDE CD

Who wants some bleak and suicidal Techno-rock minimalist from Finland? Lehtisalo family combine the autonomy of compositional like Panasonic with a far denser and less forgiving worldview. They blend low frequency oscillations with controlled rock instruments, and although

some moments are tooth-jarringly assonant, it's mostly hugely depressing.

## Roel Meelkop & (Kyeke)

STALPRAAT STILCD ON HMI CD

Meelkop is one of an increasing number of musicians to have taken an interest in ultra-minimalism, that is, barely perceptible sounds, lacking in colour and without obvious narrative structure. Meelkop's numerous silences and subtle buzzing are interrupted only by distant cracks, trills and squeaks, but he's not as extreme as, say, Bernhard Günter, and occasionally the sounds on this disc could almost pass as music.

## Steven M. Miller Subterranean

STALPRAAT STILCD ON HMI CD

There's often a fine line between minimalist composition and the New Age, and with his blend of shimmering ambient drone and serene breathy flutes, Steven Miller precariously walks it. Balinese and Japanese music may inspire his intention, but the real test comes when you play the album loud. If it sounds like mush at high volume, it's clearly New Age. If a deeper complexity shows through, the street cred conscious can sign in relief. I turned the volume up, and Subterranean survived the taste test.

## Musci/Venosta/Mariani

Loosing The Orthodox Path, VICTO

WICRO CD

Italy's most eclectic ethno-tourists return with their best World Music dedication. Their eclectic sources and stylistic borrowings are both more complex and subtle than, say, Eno and Byrne, although this trio is also much less interested in anything vaguely funky. Graggian chant, unusual instruments, plaintive guitar, anguished wails, digital processing and more combine with a refreshing lack of self-consciousness. Their fusions deplore familiarity, confusing ancient and modern without cliché.

## Rascal Reporters Happy

Accidents and Accidents, WICRO CD

This expanded reissue offers avant-rock from 1988, filled with complexity and entirely ignorant of rock music truisms such as the "loud is all-important" it's music for the body, not the head, so, it doesn't matter what tempo you use so long as you stick to it." The Rascal Reporters offer whining in place of visceral magnetism, odd changes of time signature in place of a groove, and infinitesimally weedy sound in place of richness and depth. It sends unwelcome shivers down this listener's spine.

## Steve Roden/In between

noise Split (The Soul Of Wood)

NEW PLASTIC MUSIC NEW CD

Split is an enigmatic, cryptic artifact where

every sound is generated by rubbing or scraping a 1943 moulded plywood sign. It sounds like baby rats in the plumbing, a lone, by hesitant trumpeters hugely amplified pond music, or perhaps a serene yet malignant soundtrack to a Jan Swankmeyer film.

## Superficial Depth Digital

Superficial Depth, ARTIST ARTIST CD

Composers were creating long duration music even before vinyl LPs took off, but the advent of the CD allows everyone else to join in too. Superficial Depth is a side project from Adam Heart, exploring the use of digital processing to effect gradual transformations of electronic sound. Digital Superficial Depth develops from dark ambient drone through muted helicopter sounds, and back again, all at a snail's pace. If the technique lends itself more to idealism than to misanthropy, it still remains an excellent contribution to the genre.

## Vagina Dentata Organ On

Chien, Catalan, WICRO CD

A triumph of cynicism, *Un Chien Catalan* provides over an hour of motorcycle engine noise, packaged in a classically morbid industrial sleeve with appropriate buzzwords. Presumably it's an experiment to see how arrested adolescent consumers respond.

## Various Artists Scatter

INTERNATIONAL #3 CD

On the basis of this compilation, you'd guess that only 20 per cent of American experimental music is any good at all. It is the middle American's dream of a trilogy that also visits Japan and Europe, and it's disappointing to find John Huxley, Jim O'Rourke and others looking in relevance or worse. Only Daniel Menche's noise music impresses, a wailing squall of auto-acoustic, contrasting the insected thruster with mysterious animal snuffling.

## Various Artists Solar

Translucence Volume One, SOLAR

Solar is a compilation operating in a peculiar space, which sets lax ethnic music, all with the stereotyped surreal quality beloved of western Ambient musicians, against authentic location recordings from around the world. But, is tape of a Bangkok street, a h-a-market makers' deal, authenticity is a dead notion when scuffling blasts of pop noise cloud the murky collections that contributors such as Jorge Reyes, O Yuki Conguague, Rokina Manhand and Sufjan are erect. The inclusion of Buddhist funeral music is a suitable reminder that in some cultures, drugs and religion remain closely linked, and the hallucinogenic nature of the Wozniak contributions seems therefore appropriate.

# in brief out rock

Reviewed by Biba Kopf

## Boom One Hour Talsman

CUNNINGHAM R&B CD

A power trio from Richmond, Virginia, Boom have a finely developed sense of irony when it comes to names, titles and, presumably, ambitions. Led by guitarist Anthony "The Theurgist" Curtis, neither he nor they are exactly agents of the supernatural or the divine, unless your idea of godhead was that designer jazz-funk unit Power Tods. Their music is equally controlled, clear, precise — it's rhythmic asymmetries smoothly locking with The Theurgist's riff, carefully scattered lines. A must only for fusion freaks of a nervous disposition in need of some order in their lives.

## Don King One Two Punch

(Knockout) ATLANTIC AL 434 CD

Formed by ex-Mars members Mark Cunningham and Lucy Hamilton with a trio of percussionists, Don King blasted out brainy soundscapes over crossroads of shimmering beats from Mars to martial war. The effect of their only EP "Invincible" (1996) resounded here plus the 1987 tracks, which take the scene in The Tin Drum, where Dikar the dwarf completely wrongfoots a Nazi march by beating out a different time on his toy drum. Don King similarly undermined old discipline. Yet their reivity is more elegant than gloriously countercultural, remaining less rather than defeat. The previously unreleased tracks featuring ex-Prince Uka bassist Tony Hammond go for ringing song-like clarity over natural dub lag, but "Summerme" signals the trumpet music Cunningham would later develop in Spain.

## La Düsseldorf Vivos CAPTAN TWE CD

OKS CD

## La Düsseldorf Individuelles

CAPTAN TWE CDX CD 066 CD

As mates go Düsseldorf is as ugly-spirited as most financial cities. Yet ex-Neu! member Klaus Dinger found enough there to address the city over three discs that crisscrossed his ch-ch-ch values while tapping the energy of new money courting her veins. 1978's *Vivos* follows La Düsseldorf's winning debut in its slapdash coupling of brute simple riffs and melodic ornaments caught up in the bow of Dinger's heady repetitive gush of oppositional old rock lyrics. But scratch a Motown rocker and you'll reveal a German Romantic lost in reflective notes. On *Individuelles*, the youngling thickens into a David Lynch-like on German Schlager. But all the conflicting elements come together in the blur of Dinger's speed aesthetic.

## Etienne Brunet Zig Zag

Orchestra Le Légende Du France

Rock 'N' Roll SAGAWE SP 1 CD

British prejudices have it that the legend of "Franc rock" will roll back to a very short saga. Though orchestra leader Etienne Brunet doesn't actually dispel it, she makes a case for a more frenetic, French rock enriched by encounters with leftfield progressives like Henry Cow, or No Wave funk. The result is one bastard weed hybrid L'Orchestre... actually a small set of guitar-led rock, with bassist Paul Rogers — produces some odd sonic treats and barely coordinated thrashes. But elsewhere they make listening busy for being avant-funky, and then its weakness is plain exhausting.

## Eyeeless In Gaze Caught In Flux

CHERRY RECORDS CD 045 CD

Eyeeless In Gaze was Marilyn Bates's first group. Their early 80s work is the rock of the experimental song stylings of his solo *Flux* Ballads CD. If their gloomy, introspective songs psychically are mapped by Bragg's downbeat Britain, their minimal arrangements of guitars, keyboards and crude rhythm are more likely to appeal to lo-fi slackers. But its hygienic edge is as hard to take now as it was first time round.

## Flying Saucer Attack New

LANDA DOWNS RECORDS CD

## Free Kitten Sentimental

EDUCATION MUSIC CD

The full impact of early Sonic Youth on British music wasn't felt until late in the 80s when My Bloody Valentine floated their blissful noise on SY-styled oceans of guitar overtones. But they left out one vital element: the anchor of SY's punk rhythm. *Flying Saucer Attack* are even more weightless than MBV. The druggy rock of "The Sea" aside their stoned whispers and disembodied guitar feedback make them as gravity-defying as the latest Elysian psychodrama.

Free Kitten features Julie Caffrey and SY's Kim Gordon. *Sentimental Education* starts dreamily with some touchy funk items. But around the time CD 3's Spooky remade "Christine Express", FK dunnies the mood with a sequence of stunningly physical, guitar-driven pieces, after which FSA's music barely registers at the weight-in.

## Gaseneta Sootier Or Later PSF PSF

17 CD

## Michio Kadotani Rotting

Telepathists PSF PSF 14 CD

The archaeology of Japanese underground music is turning up valuable finds that give

the job to received notions of Japan as a stifling consensus society. Each discovery asserts the presence of an individuality hitherto denied. Crudely recorded circa 1978, Gaseneta's broken-bottle punk paralleled New York No Wave in that its swartest edges were directed on themselves. A messily absorbing spectacle. High Rowe's Asahito Mago describes Michio Kadotani (1959-1990) as "the only true Japanese punk, a pure poet and musician, all too rare on the Japanese underground scene." Consisting of primitive live and home-recorded song fragments and guitar improvisations, *Rotting Telepathists* captures those intimate moments of fierce creativity where songs are conceived. *Moose*, it falls between Big Star's *Third Album* and VU's "Satan Ray" but more insistently synopsized. Highly recommended.

## Gyaalees CAPTAN TWE CDX CD 063 CD

The value of outdoor art — works of the extremely elegant, or mentally ill — is gradually achieving recognition for its expression of culturally unmediated thoughts and feelings. Gyaalees couples Japanese mentally handicapped Se-ko-ko artists with little or no memory, with a rock back-up. Unable to remember their parts, the Se-ko-ko out of necessity recreate them spontaneously, their contributions flowing into or out of the exhilarating elemental roar of percussive rock, elsewhere bouncing off or redirecting it. That raw develops, out of a religious chant, coloured by Oriental poise which is carried through to the disc's dying moments 35 minutes later, when the ritual closes with a funeral coda.

## Harmony Rockets Golden

Thicket EP PSF CDX 0011 CD

Like their parent group Mercury Rev, Jonathan and Grasshopper's Harmony Rockets are a mix. But somewhere inside the latter's muggy chime of melodramas and morose nobility to hit the evil button, is a dominant musical intelligence that intermittently awakens to squall the odd breathtaking passage into the mudkake mix. This EP of movie songs exemplifies their kindergarten spirit, what it's Willy Wonka and Vangelis covers. It's basically rock-kind, it does prove they're capable of working through an idea to its conclusion when they want to.

## Kadura From The Depths Of The

Other Space CHRONIC MUSIC CDX CD

## Kousokuya The Dark Spot PSF

PSF CD 06

The light and shade of 90s Japanese psychodrama Osaka Kadura are ready-going-on-weekly odd. Ghost myths troping along the road to Nirvana end with Quinceance, poems, Shams or shamans? Neither. They're painful, sincere but their ice-die can cushion Sunday morning comedowns.

Kousokuya are a much more difficult

proposition, albeit a less bruising one than the earlier incarnation that received a live disc for Forced Exposure. A bassless trio for guitar, drums and synth, here with occasional sax. Kousokuya head deep for the hardened whorls of the brain where each twist requires tough, yet skilful negotiation for the music to get through it. Deliriously ugly at times, but highly intriguing once you accept you're in for a bumpy ride.

## Kante Zwischen Den Orten KITE

INTERNATIONAL UNIKO 735 CD

German post-rock from the same corner as Kresler, To Rococo Rot and its sister group Tawari. Kante risk blowing the genre's mystique by clearly mapping the music as the territory between places — the ecology of post-rock is far too fragile to without-musicalism. Nominally dead instruments fit distant landmarks for the best parts to melodically run between, and the footnoted lines ensure you don't miss a turning. Yet the music's moody beauty is undeniable, even as little it lingers once it's over.

## Käthe Kruse Le Sesse Rouge bis

10014 CD 005 BFA 15 985 CD

**Quarks** Zuluatlantia MINKA CD 03  
Käthe Kruse was a founder member of Die Toten Hosen, the Berlin band whose challenging of rock's genres — from its choice of sound carrier to concert presentation — was always stimulating, sometimes quietly disturbing, and just as often charming and extremely witty. Coming ten years after Don's split, Käthe Kruse's first solo album is more song-based, yet it draws on the kind of sources that are rarely acknowledged in contemporary pop to fashion a new kind of rhythmic song or post-spoken relative scored for small, very combinations of piano, guitar and drums. Difficult to imagine it working without the dark strong flavouring of Kruse's voice, but that's the point — together and solo. Die Toten Hosen always went her own way and defied the world to follow.

The mostly electronic Berlin 10-11 duo Quarks are also on the trail of a different kind of song, but there are more wifely domestic. A toyman inadvertently cannot always deflect the disc's predilection for child-like simplicity from dancing dreamily.

## Owada Nothing FMAH 508 CD

Whitens on rock, minimalist captures a fitting in a snapshot riff and intensifies it by obsessively scratching the riff over and over, bringing it up to bursting point and holding it there. Reverse as ever, producer David Cunningham inverts the process by drawing type B & Bear to Owada's riff of anything so vulgar as an inversion and replacing it with a more nudgy mathematical idea. Finally, the effect is just as stunning, but the rhythmically hunt repetition of words — numbers, empty phrases — is numbing and, lively, annoying. Count me out.

# freefall

Clive Bell plunges through music's protecting veil and enters the realm of sonic absurdity. This month: CD pirates or Russian Robin Hoods?

**M**oscow, Tuesday. *FAD: Director of Operations at the International Federation of Record Companies.*

Dear Eddie (hell, I know this isn't your real name, I'm just taking precautions in case this falls into the wrong hands),

First, I want to apologise personally for the death threat. I wanted to make it clear that the letter was sent by a junior staffer in my office working almost entirely on her own. Anyway, Eddie, she was kidding. Lighten up, hey! You think anyone from our organisation would really do such a thing to your car, with you and your kids in it? Look, I've seen your car, as it happens, and the sun roof doesn't open wide enough for a start.

This isn't Chicago, Eddie. This isn't even St. Albans. Here in Russia, if the need arises, we prefer something less messy, like the dry ice plant. Only kidding!

Talking of music, congratulations on all the recent publicity for your heroic crusade against us, the evil CD pirates. But you've been talking up the figures again, Eddie. I see that we pirates do a washbuckling \$5 billion a year these days. Try telling that to my accounts department

next time I ask for a hi-fun my office! I can't even play the goddamn CDs without going to the staff common room, which is full of smoke. But I'm going away from the point.

We don't like the word pirates, Eddie. Some of my staff are taking the piss, wearing bandanas to work, juggling knives, and all because you label us pirates. We're businessmen, same as you. The most popular club in the company plays crazy golf on Wednesday evenings.

And we're proud of what we do. Proud that 70 per cent of recorded music in Russia is manufactured outside the mainstream industry — 70 per cent, the highest percentage in the world. The Chinese can kiss my ass. And we've been here a long time, since before your Federation got into short pants. So how about some respect? You keep on about how we're 'skimming off the top', 'screaming profits', as if that was something your precious record companies would never dream of doing. It costs me and you both 70p to make an Oasis CD, so how come yours sells for \$14 and mine for \$4? I'll tell you a secret, Eddie — it's because we love it! Call me curly — in Moscow we love The Spice Girls, we

love George Michael. That's why we just spent \$350,000 on our new manufacturing plant in the cops, nearly told you where it is, Eddie!

Sure, we make a profit that's illegal now? Our whole business is based on love of music, and I'm saying our motives are probably pure than yours. When did you last pay \$14 for a CD, Eddie? You sit in your office, listening to your top of the frigging range hi-fi, sending out for caffè macchiatto. I've seen your magazines; buy this lager because it's reassuringly expensive. How do you think that looks to the Moscow music fan?

We're the same, Eddie, we both understand what our customers can afford and we price accordingly. I don't patronise my customers. They know these are illegal CDs, and they can appreciate the subtle differences in the cover design, in the feel of the sound, between legal and illegal. It's a sensual thing. That's why we don't make the CDs look or sound identical to the real ones. What's the point if they all look the same? That erotic friction you get from holding an illegal Mariah Carey album in your hands, we supply that, too.

Sorry if I'm getting too heavy here, Eddie, I only wanted to cheer you up. I'd be honoured if you would join us next weekend at the opening party for the manufacturing plant. Bring the kids — tell you what, I'll send a car to pick them up. After all, I know where they go to school. Only kidding, Eddie! □

## Label distributors & contacts

Contact addresses are given for labels without named UK distributors. Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Catalogue, Piccadilly, Rough Trade. These, etc. In emergencies, contact Italian distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mund, Impetus, Kudos, Pinnacle Recommended, SRD, These, Vital, etc.

**3D** *These* through Vital  
**Alphaphone** through Kudos/Pinnacle  
**Arbanses** *Harmonia Mund* Fax 001 514 287 1884  
**Artifon** PO Box 20105 Athens 10033, Greece  
**Argo** through Decal/Polygram  
**Artista** through SRD

**Artists Recordings** through CDE/Hus 116  
Korn Lane East, Astor, NY 12206 USA

**ASL** through Pinnacle  
**ASL** through New Wave/Pinnacle  
**Ash International** through Kudos/Pinnacle  
**Asphodel** through SRD  
**Atavistic** through SRD

**Audio Fax** 00 35 1 26097239  
**Audiovision** through Lewlands Distribution  
Horseshorn 6, 2000 Amsterdam, Belgium  
**Aura** *Rainbow* Fax 001 318 789 6252  
**Bog Cat** through SRD/These

**Bird First** through Vital  
**Blue Death Boney** Tel 0171 607 2131  
**Bvhaard** through Celtic  
**Bonjour** Fax 01181 981 9607  
**Capitola Productions** through Cargo  
**Capitol** through EMI

**Capital** *Trig* 1-13-14 Milan-Kowal Edgemoor, Tokyo, Japan

**Charley** through Koch International  
**Cherry Music** Fax 0115 664 1829  
**Che** through SRD  
**Cherry Red** through Pinnacle  
**Cometone** through Cargo

**Crustacean Discs** through Pinnacle  
**CRT** 77 Spring St, Suite 506, New York, NY 10012-5800  
**Canamere** through ReR Recommended  
**Destiny's Circle** through SRD  
**De Teclite Doris** through EFA Germany  
**DNR** through Vital

**Demon** PO Box 658 Sirenia 102 318  
**Demone** through Vital  
**Disques Ridi** through Cargo  
**ECM** through New Wave/Pinnacle  
**Elektra Newhouse** through SRD  
**East** through Pinnacle

**East Of Ham/Hold** through Komik/Audiot  
Kringkdaa 37a, 7014 Norwaa, Norway  
**Emreline** PO Box 812, Norwaa, Norway  
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**Emreline** through ReR  
**Jazz Fudge** through Pinnacle  
**Leaf** through Vital  
**Kitty Ya** through Cargo  
**Lacemut** through Asphodel  
**Lehtikokkari** *Lehtikokkari* 25410 28100 Pori, Finland

**Levi** through Celtic  
**LI Records** 95 SE-11042, Norwaa, Sweden  
**Lovely Black** Fax 001 212 334 5149  
**Mutator** through Vital  
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# multi media

Scanning the interface of music and interactive media



Here and below, screen scenes from Radical Beauty

## Radical Beauty

CHILLOIDS: DMOZ: LOVED: RCH

## Chillas: Net Sounds Vol 1

HOSIED: MCD: RCH

Two CDs to extract the musician within or just digitized executive type?

The first, from Florida's Om Records, is a two disc set. Disc one features music by various innocuous shapeshifters of Electronic—Jonah Sharp, Phosphor, Plooms, PPM and others—while the CD-ROM material, designed by DJ Nick Philp, appears on disc two. With the credits rolling a John Cage quote typing itself laboriously across the screen while a series of blurred computer-generated images shift around, you learn to align features on a revolving wheel, parsing the data to plot you into the "Mixed Up" section. What this apparently "high sensory experience" offers, in fact, is playback of four rhythm tracks from the audio CD onto which you can drag assorted guitar, synth and drum samples. Adding a drum break here and there as well onto a locked backing track is not what I would call creative, and as they do not even loop clearly after a 16 bar break, it makes any practical application of this program futile.

Chillo, or the "Ultimate Fuzzy Groove" as it affectionately styles itself, is a full blown RQM which offers more than 600 stereo samples and a unique eight-track real-time multimedia sequencer. Again it is impossible to bypass the opening credits—when will designers comprehend that we don't want to scrutinize these tedious graphics every time we boot up

the system?

The RQM's

designers

modified

inform us, "it's

not MTV, it's

not a videogame, it's not a music CD," which

begs the question: what exactly is it then?

With far more powerful sequences easily

available free on the Net and densely

populated sample CDs cover-mounted on

music technology megapipes, I wonder what

audience this breed of CD-ROM is directed

at: Chillas gives you access to The Sound

Studio, where you can toggle between

countless drum loops and samples—in

theory, generating your own tracks. In

practice, however, the samples are very noisy,

chaotically arranged with a drum 'n' bass

rhythm saddled next to a disco loop, and with

80%—I'm not sure, which effectively means

that you simply select one rhythm, add a little

noise here and there and save it as a mix (or

should I say, "defensive future madmen").

Many of the samples are familiar, and though

ultimately favored by its programmed

limitations, I did have fun with Chillas, knocking

out my own Surroundsound Vocal CD—

Romantic Muzak all afternoon.

But it made me wonder—was I really

experiencing a "fuzzy groove trip" in an

"underworld of intelligent surrealism," or a

"top 500" version of these annoying silver

balls that clogged back and forth in the office

of every 70s middle-management type?

Better check my sebums in the mirror just

to make sure

BOB YOUNG

## Sinfonye

Red: L138

GLORIA: NOUVELLE: VISION: GLO: 03/01/01: CO+CD: ROM

As a marketing term, "Early Music" is an astonishing enough hawking of history on top of this, a considerable number of the CDs that have flourished since the advent of digital reproduction are eminently modern versions of what are often, at best, mere fragments of musical information. At least Sinfonye, the neo-medievalist group led by hurdy-gurdyist Steve Wishart, have the grace to admit this and build it into the fabric of their

(re)compositions. Having excavated a variety of grimy tunes full of troubadour licks and women's songs from the mists of time on the Hyperion label, they've gone a step further with the present collection of 14th century Florentine ecstasies by rolling the music up with a CD-ROM companion.

And for heaven's sake, that could save does rouge up the retrieval was assembled from a clutch of manuscript fragments and the RQM's motif is appropriately a jigsaw. In its favour, the content avoids the period trappings of much Early Music packaging: captions appear as sticky Dymo labels and the musicians are in 90s dress. In sum, this is a tour of four huge frescoes that have captured the group's imagination in various Italian Renaissance churches. Each painting contains a number of "mouse-sensitive" areas; clicking on them calls up selected novelties: short, enigmatic video clips (Jim Denley scratching his chin, bare feet gliding over a reflective floor), petty medieval notions, 14th century juvenile riddles, or some improvised scene montages. There's also a page from one of the music manuscripts which is supposed to demonstrate the "non-linear" aspect of this kind of writing, although Steve Wishart's explanation is drowned out by four layers of her own voice. Overall, this is a whimsical, idiosyncratic and ever so slightly pretentious take on the subject, but never dry academic. The best joke comes when, clicking on the risen Christ figure in Andrea Bonasua's Day Of Judgment in Florence's Santa Maria Novella, you're presented with the artist's invoice for his services. A moderately diverting adjunct to the music, then, but by the end you're left even further in the mystery.

BOB YOUNG

## GO TO:



## The European Free Improvisation Site

<http://www.shf.ac.uk/efi/mecsp/efi/>

This whopping site was created by improv enthusiasts Peter Szabaly three years ago, when he realised that the Web lacked a European perspective on free music. Now the balance has been more than redressed with this frame-based site that allows quick access to information about more than 50 musicians and 75 labels worldwide. This is a resource bank for the most treble jazz transcriber: leaving such vinyl- or mail-order-only imprints as Paul Lovens's Po Torch and Infinitas. Chug, it doesn't end there though: interested parties can download sound files from a variety of records, browse through selected articles and interviews taken from improv-centric journals, glean information on appropriate magazines, books and films relevant to the subject. Szabaly's dedication even extends to updating the site with upcoming tour dates for every musician featured, which often throws up a few surprises—Pete Gustafson ferns in Belleray will be in for a treat this month.

BOB YOUNG

## Oblique Strategies

<http://www.dream.com/Oblique.html>

Writers' blocked computer-workers, in need of a light kick in the butt to get inspiration, could do worse than dial in to this on-line version of Brian Eno's celebrated set of textual stimulants, the Oblique Strategies cards. There are actually several sites offering this facility (those with a Shockwave-enhanced browser should head for <http://www.nashville.net/~bryon/oblique/oblique.html>), but this is the simplest and quickest. Either scroll through all 127 options or click the randomiser for that instant kick from the blue. (NB: This column was written by removing specifics and rewriting to ambiguities, giving way to my worst impulse and "humans something from time.")

BOB YOUNG



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# print run

New music books — read, raved about, roughed up



Ravi Shankar

## Indian Music And The West

By Gerry Farrell

COLUMBIA PRESS HBK \$32.50

For a short time in the mid-60s — what Ravi Shankar called "the great star explosion" — Indian music became part of Western popular culture. Shankar was the most important figure in this passage to the West, but it was George Harrison's enigmatic-sounding star on "Norwegian Wood" that began what "Hindustani music" called "raga-rock." Harrison became a serious exponent who took lessons from Shankar, but the star briefly appeared as fashion accessory in the most unlikely places: Birmingham group The Move "shocked the

Marque patrons when they played a ten-minute "Bum-bag" while sitting cross-legged on the Marquee stage" (Hindustani Music again).

As Gerry Farrell writes in this intriguing book, there's no better illustration of "the dizzying speed with which mass media can alter, distort, consume and redefine elements from another musical culture." There's two sides to his story — the reception of Indian music and musicians in the West and the study and marketing of Indian music by Westerners in India. (Given the Raj, there's an understandable focus on Britain.) But mutual incomprehension predates the mass media. "It appears as if the West has a cultural investment in never meeting the East musically," Farrell writes, "as if the East and all

its works have to remain mysterious in order to retain artistic validity." The idea of discovery is a cultural myth which has deep cultural roots in the West. So Farrell argues Indian music has been discovered and rediscovered repeatedly since the 18th century. *Indian Music And The West* is a substantial piece of scholarly research with some musical analysis and examples. But Farrell has a light touch with his material and later chapters, especially on Ravi Shankar, raga-rock, jazz and World Music, are as shrewdly observant as they are entertaining. He begins with the scholars of the Raj who tried to notate and transcribe the music they found charming but "formless, chaotic, Hinduistic-Aryan" that became popular in the West. With the

gramophone, Western executives went on expeditions "to record native artists and generate a market in India. Fred Gaisberg, who made the first recordings there in 1902, wrote that "We found music there static, and after a few years there was very little [traditional music left to record]" — this when Indian music was undergoing great change moving from the court to the concert platform.

Ravi Shankar is the most popular in a line of Indian artists who traveled to the West. As well as influencing The Beatles, he played with jazz musicians such as John Coltrane, Don Ellis and Colin Walcott. In fact, before his death in 1987, Coltrane was vowing to take six months off to study with Shankar, and Farrell speculates on how his career might have changed direction as a result. But Shankar could be dismissive of the efforts of jazz players, assuming that Indian music is more complex rhythmically than jazz, when surely they're complex in different ways. I reckon Farrell is right to find the most successful fusion of jazz and Indian music: from both North and South, in John McLaughlin's *Shakti*.

He concludes with the 80s marketing category of World Music — in many ways "the aural equivalent of the package holiday." That comment again reflects, more on the misconceptions of the Western audience than on the music. Nasir Fateh Ali Khan — who died shortly after this book went to press — gets a lengthy discussion, together with Indipop and Bhangra. The mystical, ecstatic, gawwari that Khan brought to Western audiences in the 80s was the kind of Islamic music that corrupted the pure Hindu music tradition, according to early British scholars. Bhangra — the Southall Beat — breaks older patterns, Farrell argues. Like the music produced by a post-Bhangra British Asian musician such as Talvin Singh, it's a new Western music, not an exotic flavor borrowed by the West from the East. Maybe there's a similar story to be told about Indian cookery and the West. But if you're interested in the web of routes that led to these contemporary sounds, Farrell's book is an ideal place to start.

ANDY HAMILTON

## Another Shade Of Blue: Sun Ra On Record

By Chrys Trent

STUDIO CITY PRESS HBK \$25.00

For me, Sun Ra stands alongside Bob Dylan and Kay Hano as a towering, visionary genius. Indeed the music of Sun Ra And The Arkestra stands in much the same relation to jazz as Dylan's does to folk or Fushushtai's to rock. There are incredibly complex artists whose greatest work exists outside any such arbitrary yet rigid genre classifications. While they may reference recognizable forms and methodologies, the heart of their music —

where the soul-search comes from — remains elusive. As with all great artists it was the stuff of their lives, their psychological make-up, their background, their personal circumstances, that really fashioned their art and gave it form. As such, purely musical analyses of a Stan like Sun Ra rarely enlighten or increase our appreciation of his work.

Such an approach seems to be an exclusively male preserve. A tendency to reduce things to hard facts, like catalogue numbers and studio chronology, seems a manifestation of the same ordering impulse that drives many a normal man to the end of a railway platform on a Saturday afternoon. It's almost as if displaying any interest in the life of the artist — his childhood, his relationships — is seen as a glibly irrelevant waste left to teen mags and gits. For any artist who's created a singular worldview, however, the only terms of analysis, really, lie in the details of their life, their formative experiences. It's this ability to successfully express a singular mindset in sound that separates the likes of Sun Ra and Dylan from their Donovan-like counterparts.

No analyses of Sun Ra there, it's much use if it ignores the complex, the invented instruments, the Egyptian imagery, the theological obsessions which run through Ra's entire back catalogue. Sun Ra's concept of the antithetical relationship between his-story and my-story, his secret histories, the stringent lifestyle requirements he used to impose on Arkestra members, are all scattered clues, awaiting assembly to the meaning of the music.

So if you're looking for any 'insight' into the great man himself then Chris Trent's *Another Shade Of Blue* isn't going to be much help. What you do get is a firm trawl through the back catalogue of his Ra-less, pulling out favourites, and importing paradigm-breaking moments. Trent's writing style, however, is hardly up to Julian Cope's rated fanboy bullet-

proof, and all too often gets bogged down in note-but-don't cross of "supra" "infra", and "excellent" (but as a newcomer's port of entry to Sun Ra's omniverse, it's as good as any for the way it weaves you through his early pre-60s recordings, pointing out the best starting points in the monstrous *Evidence* reissue programme, turning over the non-alicability of key Sun Ra releases along the way).

Inevitably, the unlikely timing of its publication in the wake of John F. Sneed's *Space 3: The Place Beyond* (which was top-heavy with disorienting background 'detail') and his definitive *Primer in The Wave 1.63* makes *Another Shade Of Blue* seem redundant. Even so, this kind of fan's initiative should always be applauded. But please, no more lists.

**DAVID KERNAN**

*Available from: Smile Research, 17 Sylvia Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 6BW*

## 'zines

**Biba Kopf** *Arkestra music & ritual* press

**Cle #5**

BOX 116/13 CLEVELAND OH 44116 USA (\$12)  
Road stories are told in a language obvious to can't understand," writes Peter Liba's David Thomas, contributing to a Road Warriors feature in hometown magazine *Cle #5*, and what kind of band buddy would betray the code of silence for a cheap laugh from CMLIVANS? Sorry to disappoint you, Cap'n Thomas, but the code of silence does mean squat to the extremely generous group featured in Jim Ellis's densely packed documentary of Cleveland's garage band community, and the winners' corrob' book artists, record stores and fans who sustain it. Of the 22 groups featured on the accompanying, forcibly entertaining double-

CD, Cleveland Souzies you can be damn sure none of them will end up in the city's Rock N' Roll Hall Of Fame. Not even Quilt Mode or The Backmonkeys, despite such claims on posters as, respectively, "Electric Chue" and "Mindfuck". Then who among them wants to chow down with the hairy dead? Some of the groups may sound like zombie surf-rock, but they're none the worse for that. On the contrary, the way the Cle writings and illustrations contextualize the music suggests that Cleveland is the most concentrated zone of sewer rat vitality since the heyday of US Hardcore.

**DDDDD #17**

MALAYSIA: MARCHÉ MUSIC PRODUCTIONS (MMP) LTD. Aiming to be the last typed up cut in paste A4 one in town, more than any deep commitment to the saint of '76, DDDDD is totally horrible to look at. It is also the funniest and most incoherent appraisal of a marginal music zone hardly noted for the humor of its fanbase.

Editor/writer Simon neither scratches cows nor holds with sacred ones, but they're former DDDDD favorite Nurse With Wound or Can. Here he is on the latter's reissue programme: "Future Days Boring but not all the time. Soon Over Babylon! Very boring. Tracks alternate between dull and useless." And so on to "The Shrew vs Shrew" album expertly applies jelly to the pulsing little places and makes all of Can's output seem a smugly silly really. "Well, no it doesn't. Simon, but so what?" Consensus be damned, DDDDD's quick response articles, pop culture pieces and reviews get through a lot of music. At the very least it's a good source of information.

**Grand Royal #5**

PO BOX 26089 LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA 90026 USA (\$45)

Five issues in, The Beatbox Boys' house mag still has the edge on all comers in the lifestyle-with-music stakes for doing to be dumber, while all the time coming out smarter than the rest. Who'd have guessed that these once obnoxious, proto-lads would have been capable of transmogrifying a skat's chatter into a broad-based musical and pantribal platform aligning themselves with everyone, from the Duke Lama to Alice Empire and Techno-Animal, without downplaying their fun factor any? This issue's haicout feature takes a fauer to the white afro, Jacques Cousteau's legacy is assessed and it spends 40 pages exploring the phenomenon of Bass music. "We have yet to see a generation of white suburban kids forming Bass/Rock/Reggae influenced bands like the Hotdog hybrids, 311, Korn etc." So in this way, Bass music remains truly 'Ghetto' or underground. \*denialises Mike Diamond

**The Moderate #1**

PO BOX 16 GREENSBOROUGH VICTORIA 3088 AUSTRALIA (\$2.50)

And now for something completely serious, and sometimes seriously wrongheaded — a

briefly produced, bound and stapled A4 operation (Editor: Dave Lang) featuring an interview with Jod Fier, a doubly possessive first person stand from "Miss Diana" electric, period live reviews of Japanese noise, too much dairy stuff and a fairly broad disc section.

**Ortie #4**

19 ROUTE 100 MONTMART 75020 PARIS, FRANCE (\$54)

Claiming the underground relinquished its status through its rapprochement with the mainstream, this outsized, yet slim French language Paperback mag claims to explore the beyond of Art Brut, Z-grade cinema. Easy Listening — that is, raw arts unmediated by cultural opinion makers. Handsomely produced, it is an area definitely worth investigating. If French is not really up to working out how Baby Ford made it into this country, but Bortolomagus stake a reasonable claim.

**Panorama #4: Rocks Progressifs**

PARIS: PAYSAN, 8 RUE FILLEUR, 75018 PARIS FRANCE (EUROPE) (\$54)

Also the 2nd Music festival organizer, Annie Ramade knew the land of prejudices she was treading on when she decided to devote a sprafound issue to Progressive rock. "They suffer from a big image, and a lack of mediation," she writes. Fortunately her international notion of 'rocks progressifs' begins somewhere around Art Bary and goes on to include Quet Sun, Sleep Hairs and Tortoise alongside ZNR and others from further afield. No doubt Yes and ELP fans would burn her at the stake as a heretic.

**Rubberneck #24**

21 NEWTON DRIVE BARNSTON, HAMPSHIRE RG22 6AT (UK)

A bolded mention for Mike contributor Chris Blackford's leftfield jazz and Improv magazine, featuring notes on French improviser André Nazeau and guitarist Gary Smith, among others, and a state of the Improv art piece by Simon H. P. As ever, the reviews section is extremely thorough.

**Your Flesh #36**

PO BOX 583264 PHOENIX ARIZ 85058-3264 USA (\$41)

It might not rip into flesh with the scabrous glee of *Forced Exposure*, but any one with writer Byron Coley on the masthead has got to be worth the cover price. Its subject matter is as varied as the obsessions of its contributors. You won't be surprised to learn much of a emerges from that distant, deep sink of the American imagination where the word Hardcore covers everything from bad sex and adult exploitation movies to weird death licks. There's also two separate interviews with Swans' Michael Gira, pieces on artist Edward Kienholz and the Table Of The Elements label, and a massive reviews section covering pulp, film, videos and music.



# on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh

Prophets Of Da City's Ready D



## Geto 3000 South Africa: Cape Town Longdooof Studios

Scrawled out at the foot of Table Mountain, and curling around the peninsula coastline, Cape Town is the hub of the South African renaissance. Like an extended exotic jungle side, coffee shops squat next to avant-garde art galleries, strip joints, upmarket clothing stores and pavement traders. Across the noisy, cobblestoned Greenmarket Square on the way to the Pan African Market, you are bound to be surreptitiously propositioned with Swazi or Malawi cob: "Only the best in natural weed." Outside the Market, mamba groups

bask for eager tourists, while inside, through the tangle of languages and a labyrinth of misty wood and soapstone sculptures, stalls play Miles Davis's *Birth of a New Breed* and recent tracks by local artists such as Beyoncé, Amosondo and The Soweto String Quartet.

The fringes of this dense confluence of Western and African cultures provides the location and context for Geto 3000, a monthly event that negotiates the uneasy terrain between South African HipHop — specifically, the ghetto rap of the Cape Flats — Mitchell's Plain (Cape Town's so-called "coloured") area, as characterised by the likes of Prophets Of Da City — and the more global reaches of drum 'n' bass. On one level,

Geto 3000 provides an interactive platform for MCs and B-boys to perform over a range of beats, expanding the dialogue between two locally marginal genres; on another, it taps into the historically sensitive issue of racial integration and the ideological debates that SA HipHop and Jungle appeal to separated communities. As Pierre, a DJ from Solid Records, home to one of Johannesburg's premier DJ collectives, puts it: "Drum 'n' bass is very love-your-neighbour, very smooth and funky. Black people call it Jungle, white people call it drum 'n' bass."

Consequently, Geto 3000's choice of venue is geographically strategic. The Longdooof Studios are located in the innermost heart of Cape Town, a far cry from both the impoverished Cape Flats — a sandy wasteland once considered unfit for whites due to the levels of gang warfare — and the Eurocentric nightclub circuit which provides the venues for most of Johannesburg's drum 'n' bass DJs.

The first two Geto 3000 events were fairly typical open mic sessions, with MCs freestyling and DJs spinning crowd-pleasing mixes of Old School HipHop and formulaic Happy House-

Jungle. However, the third and most recent Geto 3000 was staged on a scale that transformed it into a uniquely South African experience: not only because of its position on the perimeter of the local music industry, but in its active exploration of the hybridised interzones between what is considered "local" (as in African and South African), and what is deemed "international".

The night headlined three groups: UK TripHop troupe The Runaways (whose *Classic Tales* album has just been issued on the UK Ultimate Dilemma label, which is distributed in SA by Solid Records); Senegal's Dossive Black Soul; and Capetown's Moodphase Five. Unlike the previous nights, there were now two stages — a small bistro affair which showcased drum 'n' bass DJs, principally a Cape Town collective known as Sublime, and a cavernous hall which accommodated the three groups, a roster of DJs spinning through the night, as well as a huge impromptu side-screen which projected what was happening on stage in pixelated black and white freeze-frame motion. A concrete passage separated the stages with the entrances domestically

Moodphase Five



acing each other. Standing in the middle of the passage meant being jostled by a jarring variety of Hip-hop beats and drum 'n' bass riles, by around 4am the respective DJs had literally synchronised into full-time meekbeat motion.

More so than the previous two nights, the third Geto 3000 seemed to draw inspiration from the experience of kwato (also known as jongo), a popular form of township dance music that reflects the young, black, urban experience, combining elements from House, R&B, Hip-hop, township jazz, reggae and ragga. Tucked away in the townships and turned around internally via the boomboxes of its meekbeat loyalists, kwato remains largely ignored by the media. But tonight it was the glue that united the Hip-hop philosophy espoused by Prophets Of Da City (a uplift of community spirit as an alternative to the rampant criminal subculture — and the myriad configurations of drum 'n' bass. At one point, P.O.D.C.'s Ready D slipped from the turntables to do Jangle with Kwato tracks off Shree's *Woor Was Jy* — 7 album while The Amani B Boys from Mitchell's Plain took to the floor for a demonstration of BJs-style breakdancing. It was an incoherent corollary to earlier in the evening, when French DJ Moose performed a sick exhibition set with Positive Black Soul, constructing a soundtrack entirely composed of noise and without headphones.

Equally as significant as Ready D's presence, both as a solo DJ and during open mic sessions, was the presence of Moodphase Sire, whose line-up includes MK Ultra, Buzuriki (Denver), Turner and DJ Bonanza (Adam Lefevy). Turner, from Cape Flats, and Lefevy, from inner city Cape Town, are the organisers of Geto 3000, and according to Turner, their main objective is to "bring Hip-hop back into the city." Up until now, Hip-hop has been ghettoised and located almost exclusively on the Cape Flats.

Moodphase Sire is a loose collective rather than a fixed unit. Its rhythmic acts are performed by a group called Boordlang, originally a psychedelic loungecore outfit with standard rock vocals. The line-up is fluid, the music fluctuating according to the addition and subtraction of human ingredients, and tonight's performance was percussively enhanced with an extra musician on drums and maracas.

The dynamic cementing Moodphase Sire's music is the repetitive funk-inspired groove set up by bassist Farius Toth and drummer Brian de Goele. Less dark and dub-influenced tonight than on previous outings, the collective also left off their set list the frighteningly fast track that comes close to live drum 'n' bass — a curious omission given the nature of the event.

Superimposed on this foundation are the three soloists: Gustaf Joao Toffo, when given enough creative space, unfolds loose saw-wave structures in stark contrast. Buzuriki's blend of Old School lyrical attitude and new School rhymes sounded like a SA take on

Cypress Hill, but somehow managed to avoid both the didactic element of Old School rap and the gangster clichés so prevalent in SA Hip-hop.

But what made Moodphase Sire's appearance particularly potent for Geto 3000, aside from their actual presence alongside a group like Positive Black Soul, was the lack of interaction between MC and DJ, and the spacing between Bonanza's samples and Toth's freestyle guitar. Bonanza's contribution began as a metacommentary on what the rest of the collective were constructing before becoming fully absorbed into the proceedings. Forget the cheesy Western associations of the American cowboy TV series, Bonanza builds short, sample-based grooves out of G6y, Basista 4 to Martin Denny, interspersed with sound effects culled from movie soundtracks (swishes of North African singing, dog barking, the clong of a Hammond organ), before muting into silks of breakdowns.

Who knows how long Geto 3000 will last, whether it will even see out the year, or explode in a self-imposed act of collapse and regeneration? For now, it is succeeding on a basic cultural level by attracting a racially integrated audience, still an exception even in post-apartheid Cape Town. And while it would be easy to bracket this most recent Geto 3000 as a case of making whistly feel funky, the more uncomfortable interpretation is that it succeeded where political rhetoric routinely stumbles, creating both a physical and psychic space to unite communities that have been divided for years.

PAUL VAN LEEUWEN

### The Gavin Bryars Ensemble with Juan Muñoz: *A Man In A Room, Gambling*

UK: London BBC Maida Vale Studios

Being about the card sharp's sleight of hand, *A Man In A Room: Gambling* is meant to confuse. Indeed, the confusion starts as soon as you enter the performance space, a radio studio in the BBC's Maida Vale complex for it is unclear whether we're attending a live radio broadcast, a recording for later transmission, or a piece of music theatre tricked out with antique studio mics and booms. The audience is initially addressed by Peter Donaldson, whose voice is familiar from Radio Four shopping forecasts, from behind a green baze desk. In his authoritative yet comforting tone he calls for complete silence when the red light goes on, meaning we are 'on air' (we aren't). Altogether, this is one of the subtlest pieces of disorienting performance art I have ever witnessed.

The project is a collaboration between composer Gavin Bryars and Spanish sculptor and illusionist Juan Muñoz, whose contribution consists of him reading, to Bryars's music, live texts based on *The Expert At The Card Table*

by Canadian gambler SM Erskine. Bryars compares the texts to the shopping forecast (hence the presence of Peter Donaldson): the meteorological information contained in the forecasts is as baffling and compelling as Erskine's technical accounts of the trickster's sleights of hand. "Some people with a high moral sense use the word 'books' to describe these subtle techniques," Muñoz recites. "I would prefer to call them 'trifles'."

Before the cards were on the table, so to speak, the ensemble aired a number of Bryars' pieces for various instrumental combinations. He opened the first night with a duet, *The South Downs*, a piece of geolynicism that evokes the atmosphere of Birg Sap in *Sixties* through Bryars's Glasson puns and Sophie Harris's following cello arpeggios. On the second night it was replaced by another duet, *To The North Shore*. Here Bryars teamed up with waltz player Bill Hawkes on a stylistically similar

work inspired by Bryars's childhood holidays in Whitby. His piano accompaniment would have been equally at home in a seaside hotel lounge.

Charming and evocative as they were, they were eclipsed by another new work, *Les Fongolies*, which was conceived as a piece to Mahler, Schoenberg and Venetian chamber music. In the cavernous studio the dim lights lit the ensemble like candlelight, with the vibas and glockenspiel chiming beneath swathes of strings.

The lights once again pebbled out announcer Peter Donaldson, as he announced the 'highlight' of the evening, *A Man In A Room: Gambling*. Muñoz appeared at a green baze table at the back of the hall, a spotlight raking down on his hair and spectacles. In the stonewalled to the CD version of the piece, Bryars claims that the music is there to distract the listener's attention from what the card sharp is up to, thus mirroring the duplicity

Juan Muñoz



## on location

of the trickster. "Now, sit in every evening, take your pack," Muñoz instructs. The balance between voice and music, on the CD version of the piece is a fine one, but in performance, depending on where you are seated, Muñoz is occasionally obliterated by the swell of sumptuous chamber music.

The double bluff is that the listener is trying to picture the mechanics of card tricks, which are not supposed to be seen, because the audience is theoretically tuning in to a radio broadcast. "You can only imagine what the gambler's lightning-fast hands are up to. 'In poker, smile inside yourself and never on the outside,'" Muñoz cautions. There is a feeling of being conspiratorially drawn into a plot, where the clues divulged never seem to bring you any closer to its resolution.

The performance over, the players leave the room undemonstratively. Then Peter Donaldson reads the shopping forecast, "for those who missed it at 16:10 today", and every one sits smiling uncomprehendingly and waiting for a good five minutes. I'm sure I detected a hint of a grin on Bryan's poker face as he left the hall.

**PIKE BARNES**

## Digital Slam 2

UK: London Digswalla

For the last two weeks of September, the streets of Camden in North London became even more of a sluce for teen dentists and Britpop wannabes than usual. But the Camden Me (the mini post-Glastonbury urban fest responsible for the lemming-like influx) has its advantages, mainly due to the oddball programming, which counteracted endless nights of lurid indie nostalgia with an event like Digital Slam. Over two consecutive evenings, the event's organisers, Digital Dispora, attempted to turn the station-like interior of Digswalla into a future music crucible, using the vanguard technology of an ISDN line to link the London club with similar spaces in New York and San Francisco, and inaugurating a series of transcontinental on-line jam sessions featuring, among others, Talvin Singh, Groovevader, Marique Gilmore. A Guy Called Gerald and Vernon Reid.

Digswalla had definitely gone digital. Banks of video monitors, manipulated by VJs, were clustered around the stage and scattered across the club space, while interactive computer workstations featured stylish graphics, some produced by that modish collective, Tomato. Previous Digital Slam events had been frustrated in their attempts to usher in the digital revolution by that old standby, malfunctioning technology. On the second night, it looked as if the glitchers were still in place, as the ISDN lay dormant, and the irritatingly frequent announcement, "We've got technical difficulties, please be patient" was repeated from the stage into the 1am zone and beyond.

The lack of an ISDN link was no hindrance,

Marique Gilmore



however, to the enthusiasm of the creators of the DeskTop Media event. Live video feeds were throwing images of the scene at the club onto a screen behind the stage, as well as onto the related Website for a Netcast using RealVideo and RealAudio. Meanwhile, photographers hurried to capture this representation of the future now on film. At times, everyone seemed more concerned with recording the event for posterity, rather than generating any kind of atmosphere on the night.

And then there was a flicker on the screen behind the stage and we had contact. On the night I attended the ISDN was plugged in for live video and sound conferencing with a very similar looking club in San Francisco. We waited at them, they waited at us. The San Francisco MC encouraged everyone to make

some noise, and so did his London counterpart. At one point, someone moved the camera in San Francisco so that we could see their screen which was showing us. Now we could all wave at the camera and see our image relayed on the other side of the world, which was about as diverting as watching yourself on closed-circuit TV. This went on for a while until someone decided that we should move to the same music. So the DJs in San Francisco beamed us their tracks, and then drummer Marique Gilmore played a typically hair-raising, hyperactive set of live drum, in bass from the Digswalla stage, and the ISDN carried it down the line to Trisco. Later still, Talvin Singh's Anokha collective and A Guy Called Gerald took to the boards to transmit their respective mutant breakbeat hybrids across the Atlantic.

But all these sets used the ISDN link up as an alternative medium for a live transatlantic telecast rather than a conduit for a real-time two-way dialogue between musicians separated by vast distances. But there was still a palpable sense that audiences could be linked, that sympathetic spaces separated by time zones could be beamed and inhabited. At its best, Digital Slam was like one giant telephone conversation between like-minded clubbing audiences, a notion reinforced when a number of contemporary beat poets took to the stages in London and San Francisco simultaneously, and proceeded through a series of rousing exchanges that underlined Pat Califia's assertion that on-line technologies will be the digital campfires of the 21st century.

The previous night Marique Gilmore in



London and Vernon Reid in New York had jammed on-line. Tonight, the on-line music sessions were supposed to unite Taler Singh in London with DJ Polynog in SF, followed by Marquee Gilmore and The Hardless Brothers. But by 20m there had still been no on-line jamming, and by that time, after five hours of digital slammer, it, it had enough: the digital revolution would have to proceed without me, for tonight at least.

ISDN audience linking could be the next step in the evolutionary process of clickland and performance, but as always when it comes to digital technology, these are early days. For the moment, an event like Digital Siam feels more like a garbled hallucination driven by millennium fever, than a genuine vision of the future now.

BLAKE BISHOP

# **Zakir Hussain/ Hariprasad Chaurasia/ Vikku Vinayakram/John McLaughlin**

UK: London Royal Festival Hall

## **U Srinivas**

UK: London Bhavan Centre

The celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Indian independence should have been an opportunity to gorge on a feast of music from the subcontinent, but despite a season of events at London's South Bank Centre, few really major musical highs seemed to have transpired. Having witnessed one of the South Bank season's biggest draws — a Zakir Hussain-led concert at the Royal Festival Hall — this may have been a good thing

It was certainly a show that raised expectations, if only because it reunited three quarters of John McLaughlin's mid-70s Kamatic-jazz fusion supergroup Shakti. Zakir Hussain, one of the world's great tabla players, Vikku Vinayakram, virtuoso of the ghataam or clay pot, and of course, McLaughlin himself. Only vocalist L. Shankar was absent from the original line-up, his place taken by the more understated bamboo flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia. So while the event — and for once 'event' seemed like a fair description of the evening — couldn't be billed as such to all intents and purposes this felt like a full-on Shakti reunion. Certainly one look at the audience would have confirmed this: the odd Asian face could be glimpsed in a solid-out crowd of predominantly middle-aged white men. This was an audience that had clearly grown up with Maniashnu Orchestra records, and if they hadn't actually bought a record since either the advent of punk or the advent of their own parenthood (or else adapted altogether more Mao-like tastes), then that wasn't going to get in the way of their enjoyment of the evening's proceedings.

The concert opened acceptably enough, with a raga performed by Zakir and Hariprasad, although it already conformed to what would turn out to be one of the show's key problems. Zakir's disconcerting over-mixed percussion, which drowned out the more subtle flute passages. Adding insult to injury, the flautist's gorgeous solo in the raga's alap section was generally marred by what appeared to be an outbreak of bronchitis in the audience, which was miraculously cured by McLaughlin's appearance (now that's some serious musical healing going down). One might have expected the mix to settle down at this point, but the performances to come suggested that Zakir's predominance was something he actually encouraged.

The night started to look really ominous when McLaughlin wandered on-stage with some damn electric jazz guitar. The instrument he played with Shakti — and which graced the sleeve of *Handful Of Beauty* — was a unique acoustic guitar-sitar hybrid whose sound was integral to the group's as Shakti's soaring, luscious line. OK, this wasn't a Shakti concert, but what McLaughlin went on to play was appalling, his choice of instrument only adding to the sense of incongruity. The great objection to McLaughlin in his heyday was that he was all technique, but that always missed the point: even at the most improvable speeds, he had absolute control of dynamics and melodic nuance. Tonight's performance would have backed up all those old objections, as McLaughlin's tightly compressed sound eschewed any dynamic subtlety, and his formerly intense improvisations were reduced to disinterested noodling and prim jazz chording utterly inappropriate to the setting. Despite McLaughlin's performance, it took the concert's final piece — a Kamatic raga calmswain in a 30 minute sequence of sensuous riffs and drags — to get to the heart of what was wrong about the whole show. There is no doubting the legendary skills

of both Zakir and Vinayakram, and the joys of Indian classical music are partly predicated on a delight in virtuosity, but these performances could only be described as grandstanding. Naturally, the 3000 plus audience loved every moment, and that says so much. This was an environment which encouraged showy performances, robbing the music of any sense of genuine communication, apparently giving the audience what it wanted, but leaving a very sour taste in the mouth indeed.

A fortnight later, a very different environment: the converted West London church that now houses the Bhavan Centre, an institute dedicated to the promotion of Indian art and culture. As part of a series of Asian Music Circuit concerts celebrating the Silver Jubilee, the electric mandolinist U Srinivas is making a rare London appearance. In Southern India, of whose Kamatic musical tradition he is a practitioner, Srinivas is a legend, playing to audiences of up to 10,000. Live senior maestro Shivkumar Sharma and tenor saxophonist Kadir Gopalnath, this twenty-something virtuoso has introduced an entirely new instrument to a musical tradition thousands of years old — in fact he has become so associated with the instrument that it's been rumored that he is known as Mandolin Srinivas.

At the Bhavan Centre the audience was perhaps a couple of hundred strong at the outside, but Srinivas and his group — which included violin, mridangam, ghataam, and a second mandolin played by Srinivas's younger brother and disciple U Rajesh — performed as though it was the most important show they had ever given, playing almost three hours of the most incredibly integrated music I have heard. Everything works. The Srinivas brothers' playing is astonishing, their lines intertwined in the most liquid way, in atomic-clock union one moment, dissolving into sympathetic improvisations the next. And the percussion work was the polar opposite of that heard at the Festival Hall show, rhythms morphing in constant yet almost imperceptible flux.

At the evening's close the small audience is rapturous. They know that it's over, but aren't wasting time trying to impress them, instead, they have been spoken to in the most complex, beguiling language.

SIMON HOPKINS

# **HIA & Biosphere: Birmingham Frequencies**

UK: Birmingham, Rotunda

"It looks so clean from up here," remarks one spectator while looking down on her hometown from a semi-circular boardroom on the 12th floor of Birmingham's Rotunda building. From this privileged vantage point you could easily forget the soot-smeared smelt of rotting vegetable refuse from the market place or the acid piss spray of arse from the subway below. But then nothing from the outside is permitted to foul the air of this "happening" — that's how organisers Oscilate

## on location

described it in their newsletter — which is a big letdown, quite frankly, given the prominence the city itself was supposed to play in the proceedings.

Birmingham Frequencies was set up as a rematch between Norwegian Geir Jansen of Biosphere, and homebody Bobby Bird, of HIA, who had collaborated two years previously on top of a mountain in Norway for the Polar Sequences event. The idea, on both occasions, was to sample sounds from the immediate surrounds and convert them into compositions specific to the concert site. It being a multimedia event, the boardroom — partitioned into music and coffee bar zones — has been visually primed. In the music area, the musicians' digital technology is arranged at kneeling level, while to one side, a video screen runs abstract images which are also magnified onto the back wall. Another screen in the bar zone repeatedly shows a short Birmingham city film, broken up with portentous slogans like "architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space." Having spelt out the theme, it remains resolutely unambitious. Any hope that the HIA/Biosphere collaboration might expand on it, even so much dashed — nothing this pair does is that dramatic — as dribbled away once the event proper

starts up in the music room. Now the shimmering wallpaper projections turn concrete, with more arcane city images — rooftop skylines, canal tunnels, trains — flashing up in rough sync to sounds.

If not exactly original, potentially this set-up has plenty to offer — at the very least an audiovisual portrait of the city, be it celebratory or critical. Although having said that, celebration alone, along the lines of 20th-century cinema montage masterpieces like Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* is no longer enough. The face of the modern city has changed. In the case of seceding up communication and coping with mass movement across an ever expanding urban sprawl, the infrastructure has been digitized, traffic control, the flow of information, video surveillance, computerized personal files all electronically intrude on the privacy of the citizen. Such digital profiles extend the reach of the controllers deeper into the lives of city dwellers. Deploying similar technology in the name of art, tonight's Arts Council Lottery

HIA's Bobby Bird and Biosphere's Geir Jansen sample the city



funded musicians and artists forsake the chance to reverse the signals, or to extend their reach into the innards of the city, and instead content themselves with occasional rhythmic edits and repeat shots to break up the flow of not unattractive urban images.

The screened images and the digitized audio city samples constitute the interface of time — both the real-time of the event and the frozen-time of the audiovisual images — and space. The city films contrasted with the panorama of the city at night just beyond the Rotunda's windows. Working this interface, the visual artists (Bobby Bird, Geir Jansen) and the HIA/Biosphere duo have the means to make play with the relationship between the inside and the outside, between street level and The Rotunda heights, and who polices the flow of information between them. If they consider themselves to be something more than an extension of the corporation's PR apparatus, it's down to the artists to display a little more critical awareness. Then the night might

actually leave a few psychic scars on the boardroom walls for the businessmen to ponder come Monday morning. But nothing impinges on reality for dreams, come to that, in any meaningful way, especially not the music. Admittedly it's not easy to sample sounds specific to the city without marking them with a Birmingham accent or a distinguishing audio feature. If nobody would seriously expect anything so dramatic as Ernst Lubitsch's *Neubauten* from this sedentary company, they might have hoped the pair could have produced something a little more sonically abrasive, rather than ever so slightly soiled, otherwise colorless keyboard tones. These they drizzle into a slightly abstract but moodwise, mostly local narrative accompaniment to the visuals, which, shot straight, with marginal editing interference or theatrical treatment, have about as much appeal as a local TV news item.

The problem with such sedentary Electronica types like HIA and Biosphere is they have so inscribed themselves with the

ideology of furniture music — that is, music's sole function is ornamental and not in the least critical — that it makes no difference where they source it. They can no longer react to any signals that demand an emotional or intellectual response, they're only good for recording the soft stuffing for their furniture sounds. You don't have to be Ballard or Burroughs to hope the people with the technology — in effect, their artificial ears, eyes and limbs — might extend their reach, and expose something more than the trans arriving at New Street on time. But the music resulting from this collaboration confirms the technophobe's fear that their astounding progressions don't so much increase their operators' mobility as render them inert and unresponsive at their consoles.

Somewhat damningly, a cake modelled on The Rotunda, looting precariously like the leaning Tower of Pisa on a table bedecked with fairy lights, appeared more capable of movement.

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# WIRE

# david toop

on Harry Smith: American man of mystery



Just leaving the shallow and entering the deep end with a new book and I'm wondering, the way you do, just what it is I'm writing and why. I may also be impressed by the way that scattered and obscure subjects can coalesce, or come into focus, just at the moment you need them to.

I had been thinking again about Harry Smith, a pioneer of animated abstract film in America. In 1972 I read an *Art Forum* article about Smith, extracted from P. Adams Whitney's book, *Visions: Film Stills from Smith's films*. It looked extraordinary, some hand painted or bakelite directly onto celluloid, some photographed from collages with titles such as "The Ascent To Heaven On A Dentist's Chair," "The Descent From Heaven In An Elevator" and "The Skeleton Juggling A Baby In The Central Tableau Of Heaven." His films were inspired by magic and music. *Film No. 4*, for example, begins with a pan over a painting created to Dizzy Gillespie's "Manteca."

From reading that article, I discovered more about Smith, who turned out to be one of those characters who has changed the world a little bit yet remained in total obscurity. Then he went to the back of my mind. There seemed little else to discover: I knew he lived in the Chelsea Hotel in New York; I could have tried to meet him during a visit but I didn't. Then he died. That was that.

But struggling with the subject matter of this new book of mine, I found myself thinking about Harry Smith again, and all the folds and creases and overlaps that seem to have been roned out of America's musical history. A number of random conversations earlier this year fanned the spark. The most recent was in Germany — a friend and I discussing LaMonte Young as he played me a prate tape of LaMonte singing a cowboy song accompanied by Tony Conrad, so centering the connection between American folk music and its exotic expansions. The first conversation took place in Cork, where I listened to a creator of sound art and installations named Dan Barry McCarthy speaking passionately about his work in relation to blacksmithing and horse imagery on shamanic drums. This was followed, a few weeks later, by DJ Spooky emerging from the windowless vinyl storage room of his New York apartment, brandishing a tape of Harry Smith recordings at me. "Do you know this guy?" he asked.

Well, yes and no. I knew about the films, though I had never seen one. I owned copies of the *Folkways* Records LPs that Smith compiled for Moe Asch: the three-volume, six LP *Anthology Of American Folk Music*; and a triple LP box entitled, somewhat misleadingly, *The Koway Psyche Meeting*. This latter release is typical of Harry Smith. The peyote songs, plus some lengthy narratives, were recorded by Smith during a visit to Anadarko,

Oklahoma. His sleeve notes include some gems: "I would like to make it clear that of the people I later worked with," Smith wrote, "none were met in the jail, the unfortunate victims of that place only provided the contacts. Also it would be only fair to say that while I was in Anadarko I was drinking heavily and it was only natural that some of the people I worked with also drank."

Not the kind of thing an American ethnomusicologist would dare to admit in the 90s. But then Smith was a complex character who didn't give a shit. He claimed that his father gave him a blacksmith shop when he was 12 and told him to make gold from lead. He was also known to suggest that Aleister Crowley was his real father.

Perhaps it was this interest in Crowley that persuaded Smith to encourage Kenneth Anger in the early stages of his film making career. According to Bill Lands in his biography, Anger, "Smith had a propensity for huge drug consumption: heroin, speed, acid, and, even in his sixties, smoking crack and huffing Liquid Paper with young apprentices. He cared not at all what people said about him — the more ominous the better — but, in general, everyone got along with him."

That seems not quite the whole truth. Barry Miles's biography of Allen Ginsberg describes Smith coming to visit Ginsberg, hurting himself and staying a year. "He took a perverse enjoyment in antagonizing Allen," wrote Miles, "who was once reduced to slapping him in frustration." Bob Dylan dropped in, keen to meet this legendary archivist whose *Folkways* compilations of blues, folksongs and spirituals had given him most of his

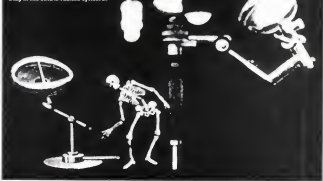
early material. Smith wouldn't get out of bed. Finally, Ginsberg's psychiatrist had to eject Smith, since his parent's blood pressure was threatening to shoot off the scale.

Why, after 25 years, should I come across so many Harry Smith references all at once? Talking about surrealist chance operations and cut-ups, Smith said, "Somebody later, perhaps Burroughs, realised that something was directing it, that it wasn't arbitrary, and that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance."

I don't know about that, but I do know that Smith's *Anthology Of American Folk Music* has just been issued in CD form by Smithsonian Folkways, complete with interactive material about Smith himself, and that Greil Marcus's book, *Invisible Republic*, suggests that the anthology was the basis for Bob Dylan's *Bosmeron* tapes. Smith also claimed he designed record covers for The Beatles' record company, Apple. Perhaps I should read Barry Miles's new *McCarthy* book as well.

By the time he reached the end of his life, Harry Smith liked the idea that music could change the world. He didn't really like records, however. "Any kind of popular trend is infinitely more wholesome than listening to old records," he told John Cohen for *Sing Out* magazine in 1968. "It's more important that people know that some kind of pleasure can be derived from things that are around them — rather than to catalog more stuff — you can do that forever, and if people aren't going to have a reason to change, they're never going to change."

Harry Smith's *The Skeleton Juggling A Baby In The Central Tableau Of Heaven*







## MAX LÄSSER

between (jazz)

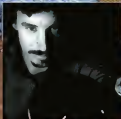
Max Lässer's music is a unique blend of jazz and contemporary pop. His album 'between' is a collection of songs that explore the boundaries between these two genres. Lässer's music is characterized by its melodic lines and sophisticated harmonic language. The album features a mix of original compositions and covers of classic jazz standards. Lässer's playing is both technically proficient and emotionally resonant, making 'between' a must-listen for anyone interested in contemporary jazz.



## ACHISA

Nicholas (jazz)

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## GARY MECK

Good Friends (jazz)

Gary Meek is a unique blend of jazz and contemporary pop. His album 'Good Friends' is a collection of songs that explore the boundaries between these two genres. Meek's music is characterized by its melodic lines and sophisticated harmonic language. The album features a mix of original compositions and covers of classic jazz standards. Meek's playing is both technically proficient and emotionally resonant, making 'Good Friends' a must-listen for anyone interested in contemporary jazz.

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